AYESHA (RA)

Naima Sohaib

Muslim Heroes series No. 1

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Foreword

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

Few authentic books are available in English on the subject of Muslim heroes. The ones that are there focus mainly on the Companions of the Prophet (SAW). Little is known to the general masses about the great personalities who had an impact on thousands of Muslims - who came after the Companions. When I read "Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shakhsiat" I realized that it filled a gap. I thought of translating it into English so that all segments of our society have access to it.

The best part about this book is that it does not just contain stories of eminent people. It also focuses on the lessons that we need to learn from these sincere Momins – May Allah have mercy on them. This book has covered 20 Muslim heroes. Each hero is being presented as a separate booklet. You have the first one in your hands.

The first character the author has chosen is Ayesha Siddiqua (RA), the beloved wife of the Prophet (SAW). Although a lot is known about Ayesha (RA), she was included in this book because she is one Muslim woman who contributed immensely to the deen of Islam. May we all, men and women, learn from her devotion and sincerity towards Allah (SW).

I would like to thank Sohaib Umar for his help with the editing and the formatting of this booklet, Nadeem Siddiqui for the title design, and my husband Asif Misbah for his love and support.

Eeman Asif Misbah

Ayesha Siddiqua (RA)

The Most Outstanding Female Scholar of Islam

& A Role Model for Muslim Women

Who was Ayesha (RA)

Her name was Ayesha, her given names were Siddiqua and Humera, her kuniat was Umme Abdullah and her title was Mother of the Believers. She was the daughter of Abu Bakr (RA) and was related to the Prophet (SAW) in the eighth generation. Allah (SW) conferred the title of Mother of the Believers on her as well as on the other wives of the Prophet (SAW). Until then, she was known as Umme Abdullah. The Arabs had a custom of naming a person after their children. She had no offspring of her own. Once she mentioned to the Prophet (SAW) that all his other wives had offspring by whose names they were called, so who could she be called after? He replied, "After your nephew Abdullah."[1] After that day, she was called Umme Abdullah.

She belonged to a family that needs no introduction. Her father Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddique (RA) was the closest friend of the Prophet (SAW). He was the first man to accept Islam among men. His services to Islam are well known to all. He had the distinction of becoming the first Caliph of Islam after the death of the Prophet (SAW).

Her Birth

There are different opinions surrounding the birth of Ayesha (RA). Nothing can be concluded as the last word. Two opinions are more popular than the rest. According to the first opinion,

she was born at the end of the fifth year of prophethood; the second one places her birth five years before the advent of Islam. Both views are highly contradictory. The author sides with the first opinion because of reasons which will be mentioned later.

Her Childhood and Early Life

Ayesha (RA) was a fair, rosy-complexioned, robust and pretty child. She was active and playful and very fond of her toys. Her friends always surrounded her. They used to share a common love for dolls. Sometimes, when the Prophet (SAW) used to appear, they used to hide here and there, along with their dollies. He used to call out to them to come out and play. Once Ayesha (RA) was playing with her dolls as usual when he passed by. Among the toys was a horse with wings on either side. He asked her, "Ayesha what is this?" She replied, "It's a horse." The Prophet (SAW) said, "But horses do not have wings." She replied, "Why? Suleman's (AS) horses had wings." He smiled at this answer.[2]

Besides playing with dolls, another pastime was her fondness for swings. But her childhood did not merely pass in frolic and play. The house of Abu Bakr (RA) was affected by every trial and tribulation of Islam. The severity of the situation in the early days of Islam forced Abu Bakr (RA) to migrate to Abyssinia. He could not complete his journey due to some unknown reason and returned to Mecca, but Ayesha (RA) remembered this incident with all the minor details.

One can imagine what her childhood must have been like, from this statement of hers, "As soon as I became aware of my surroundings, I found my parents deeply involved in religion and not a single day passed by when the Prophet (SAW) did not visit our house morning and evening."

Her Nikaah

The first wife of the Prophet (SAW) was Hazrat Khadija (RA). She was his devoted companion, sharing his sorrows, constantly supportive. She met her last in the 10th year of prophet hood, which was a source of great misery for the Prophet (SAW). One day, Hazrat Khawla bint Hakim, the wife of Usman bin Mazoon (RA) came to the Prophet (SAW) and recommended that he marry again. She suggested the names of Ayesha (RA) and Hazrat Sawdah (RA). The Prophet (SAW) gave his assent for taking the matter further on both counts. Hazrat Khawla approached Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) and Umme Rooman (RA) for Ayesha's hand. Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) was surprised because he considered the Prophet (SAW) to be his brother, so how could this match be possible with a niece. When the Prophet (SAW) heard of this confusion, he said, "Abu Bakr is my brother in Islam and in such kind of brotherhood, nikaah is permissible with the offspring."[3]

After hearing Prophet's (SAW) point of view, Hazrat Abu Bakr was satisfied on this end, but a nagging doubt persisted because Ayesha's betrothal had been arranged with the son of Jubair Bin Mataam. So it was necessary to talk to him in this regard. Jubair's family had yet not converted and they themselves ended this commitment, as they did not want any trouble in the family. Hence now there were no more anxieties in finalizing the marriage with the Prophet (SAW).

Hazrat Ayesha's nikaah was solemnized with the Prophet (SAW) in the month of Shawaal, the 10th year of prophet hood when she was six years old. The dower was fixed at 500 Dirhams. The nikaah was performed in such a simple fashion that Hazrat Atiya narrates, "Ayesha was playing with her friends outside. Her nanny fetched her and brought her inside". Her father performed her nikaah himself.

According to Ayesha (RA) herself, "When my nikaah was

performed, I myself did not know that I had been married. When my mother started to restrict my comings and goings with friends, I understood what had happened. Then my mother also explained to me."

After reading this episode, it seems likely that Ayesha was indeed six years old at the time of her marriage. However, there exists some difference of opinion over her age as some claim Ayesha's age to be 15 years, although it seems strange how a 15-year old girl could be playing outside when her nikaah was performed, and how could she be unaware of what was happening. Imam Muslim's narration is also in favor of this wherein Ayesha (RA) claims her age to be six years at the time of nikaah and nine years at the time of rukhsati. She further added that at this time, her dolls were with her.

After her nikaah, she stayed in Mecca for almost three years, and seven to eight months in Medina after Hijrat. After the Prophet's (SAW) migration with Abu Bakr, she along with her mother, sister and brother, also headed for Medina.

Her Wedding

On reaching Medina, Ayesha (RA), along with her relatives, stayed in the compound of Banu Harris Bin Khizrij, for seven to eight months. The climate of Medina did not suit the Meccans and many of the Muhajirins fell sick. Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA), and subsequently Ayesha also fell prey to illness. Ayesha's case was so severe that she lost her hair as well. By Allah's mercy they all recovered. Abu Bakr approached the Prophet (SAW) for the wedding, who mentioned that he had no money to pay Ayesha the dower that had been fixed. As on every occasion, Abu Bakr (RA) came forward to help and offered the amount to the Prophet (SAW) so that the wedding could take place without delay.

The Prophet (SAW) sent the dower money to Ayesha. The

women of the Ansar came to congratulate Ayesha and to see her off on the occasion. Umme Rooman called out to her daughter. Ayesha was out on the swings with her friends. She came running on hearing her mother's voice. She washed Ayesha's face, and styled her hair nicely, then made her into a bride. A few moments later, the Prophet (SAW) also arrived.

In this way, Ayesha (RA) was wedded off in a very simple manner in the month of Shawaal, and came to the Prophet's (SAW) house. No ignorant tribal customs were adhered to in the wedding ceremony. Traditionally, the Arabs did not marry in the month of Shawaal, which they considered inauspicious. Ayesha's nikaah and wedding both took place in this month. The Arab custom of lighting a fire in front of the bride was not followed nor was the wedded couple seated in the Howdah on a camel. The payment of the dower was considered sufficient to take the bride home.

Domestic Affairs and Management of the Household

As Abu Bakr (RA) was a well-off man, Ayesha grew up in comfortable surroundings. The house she married into was hardly a palatial one; it was the humble dwelling of a prophet. It was a small room adjoined to Masjid-e-Nabvi and the door of the house opened into the mosque. The room was barely 7-8 feet long. The walls were made of mud and the roof of palm leaves and branches. A blanket was draped over the roof to protect the room from rainwater. The ceiling was so low that a man could touch it if he extended his arm. The total belongings of the household were a charpoy, a mat, a bed, a pillow, two pots to keep dates and flour, a container for holding water, and a bowl.

If the Prophet (SAW) had desired wealth, Allah would have poured abundance of gold and silver for His beloved. But he preferred the life of poverty for himself and his family. Forty or so nights used to pass often without the stove being lit in the

houses of his wives. Ayesha herself relates that the Prophet's (SAW) family never ate heartily for a full three days at a stretch. Generally their meals consisted of mere dates and water.

The Companions of the Prophet (SAW) often used to send gifts and money to the Prophet (SAW) but he used to distribute them among the needy before they even had a chance to come into his household. Often the Prophet (SAW) used to come home and inquire if there was anything to eat, and he got the reply, "O Rasool Allah! Nothing – except Allah and his Prophet." He used to generally fast on such days. And Ayesha (RA) used to follow suit.

These were not merely the circumstances of the early period, this state continued throughout his life. After the conquest of Khyber, the Prophet (SAW) fixed a monthly stipend for his wives, but the generosity of his family members knew no bounds. The monthly rations were exhausted in a few days. Far from complaining or being unthankful to Allah, the daughter of Abu Bakr had molded herself into the way of the Prophet (SAW).

As Hazrat Ayesha (RA) was young in age, she was often forgetful about household matters. Often, she used to knead the dough, keep it aside and used to doze off, and a stray goat would come and eat it up. One day she made the dough into small cookies. While waiting for the Prophet (SAW), she dozed off. A neighbour's goat came in and gobbled them all up. She was not an expert in cooking food. But this does not mean that she took no interest in household affairs; in fact, she herself cleaned the house, kneaded the dough, and made bread. She took special care of the needs of the Prophet (SAW). She used to wash his clothes with her own hands. Ayesha (RA) used to wash his hair lovingly and comb it. She also applied perfume on his clothes. The Prophet (SAW) used to be particular about his miswak; she paid special attention to all his requirements.

When there were guests at her house, she was very hospitable to them. Many a times, the Prophet (SAW) used to bring guests home and she would do everything possible for their comfort. In the words of Hazrat Qais Ghafari, “One day the Prophet (SAW) said, “Let’s go to Ayesha’s house.” We came to the Hujra with him. The Prophet (SAW) said, “Ayesha! Please give us some food.” She brought some food. He asked for something else to eat. She got some Hareera. He again asked for something else. She presented some milk. After that, she brought some water in a bowl.[4]

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) not only did her best to perform her household chores, but also tried to support and honour the family ties and relations of the Prophet (SAW). He had four daughters out of whom she had the privilege of spending more time with Fatima (RA). She was Ayesha’s stepdaughter, but she was very kind to Fatima throughout her lifetime. She participated wholeheartedly in Fatima’s wedding. Ayesha always used to be high in her praises. Till the very end, they enjoyed an especially cordial relationship.

Love for and Obedience towards her Husband

The relationship between Ayesha and the Prophet (SAW) is known to all. She never went against any of his wishes. She did her best to serve him and took special care of his comfort and needs. She also bore the agony of being one of nine wives. She describes her feelings in these words: “ I did not see the Prophet (SAW) for one night so I thought that he had decided to visit some other wife. When I found him, he was in Ruku or Sajdah, reciting, ‘You are pure, I praise You, there is no God save You.’ I said (to myself), “May my parents be sacrificed for you! You are engaged in some other work and I was thinking of other things.”[5]

Once during a journey, Hazrat Ayesha (RA) and Hazrat Hafsa (RA) exchanged their camels. When the Prophet (SAW) came

to Ayesha's camel, he found Hafsa and started engaging in conversation with her. Ayesha's consternation was worth seeing. When the party stopped for a break, she stepped on the grass, barefooted, saying, "If a scorpion bit me, it would be better than being separated from my beloved!"[6]

Except for a few isolated incidents, she enjoyed a pleasant relationship with all the other wives. She used to always praise the qualities of the other wives. If there was an argument, she used to stay well within her limits and the matter would quickly resolve itself.

Ayesha was very careful about the likes and dislikes of the Prophet (SAW). If he found a matter distasteful, it would also aggravate her. Once a woman came and reported that some women were lamenting and wailing at Jafar's house. The Prophet (SAW) replied, "Stop them from doing it!" She came back and stated that they were not agreeing to stop. The Prophet (SAW) said, "Throw ashes at their faces!" She went and again returned with some statement. Ayesha was looking out from a crack in the door, she got agitated at the woman for giving agony to the Prophet (SAW) without cause; she was not doing what he was telling her to do, nor was she leaving him alone.[7]

Once the Prophet (SAW) was resting with his head in her lap, when Abu Bakr (RA) came in and slapped his daughter in a fit of anger. Ayesha (RA) states that she did not move, only because she was afraid that the Prophet's (SAW) sleep would get disturbed. [8]

Ayesha used to obey the Prophet (SAW) with complete devotion. Once the Prophet (SAW) entered her house and glanced at a curtain, which she had put up. It had pictures on it. The colour of his face changed and he tore the curtain up. Then he said, "The worst torment on the Day of Judgment shall befall those who try to draw pictures of Allah's creation." According to another tradition, Ayesha (RA) cut up the curtain later and

made pillows out of it. [9]

Her love for the Prophet (SAW) was not a one-sided affair but he also used to value and love her greatly. He used to sit on the same mat as Ayesha while eating and used to eat out of the same plate. Their mutual love was so intense that he used to chew the bone for the same end where Ayesha had left it. He used to drink water from the same place where her lips had touched the cup. Once a neighbour invited him for food. He asked, “Is Ayesha going to be there?” The man said no. The Prophet (SAW) declined the invitation. He again invited him. The Prophet (SAW) again asked the same question. The third time the neighbour got wise and invited Ayesha as well and the Prophet (SAW) readily agreed to come to his house.[10]

The Holy Prophet (SAW) used to humour Ayesha a lot. Light hearted jokes and joyful remarks made for a blissful atmosphere in the Prophet’s (SAW) house. When Ayesha used to flaunt her womanly airs, he used to put up with her in a patient manner. Once he commented, “Ayesha I can tell whether you are happy or angry with me. When you are upset, you swear on the God of Ibrahim, and when you are happy, you swear on the God of Mohammad.” Ayesha (RA) replied, “O Rasool Allah! Only my tongue stops reciting your name!”[11] (Meaning that her heart never ceased to love him).

These and other such incidents very clearly indicate that the Prophet (SAW) was very considerate towards his wives and took out time to be with them. He used to care about their smallest needs in spite of being busy with the training of his Ummah, the constant warfare with the enemies of Islam and his extensive worship in the nights. From racing round the block with Ayesha, to letting her watching Bedouin spear shows, the Prophet (SAW) used to handle his wives according to their nature, age, and maturity.

The idea behind taking a glimpse into the private life of the

Prophet (SAW) is that Muslim men should consider him as a role model. They should examine their own behavior with their wives and evaluate it against the Prophet's (SAW) example. In spite of the status granted to him by Allah, it was remarkable that he used to give so much importance to the feelings of his wives, he attempted to keep them all happy, and he made an effort to maintain an atmosphere of love and friendship with each one of them. He is an ideal example for Muslim men. It is unfortunate that common man aside, even Muslim men who are religiously knowledgeable show so little concern in this aspect of their lives. Far from being ashamed at their careless behavior with women, they are not even aware of the gravity of their shoddy treatment, nor do they take steps to improve their callous behavior.

The strange part is that they conveniently take full measures to know and exercise their rights but when it comes to their duties, they turn a blind eye towards their responsibilities. They think they've done their part by merely giving their women food, shelter and clothing. Most women are deprived of love, affection, and consideration that are their basic rights.

The Prophet (SAW) had a wonderful attitude towards all his wives. It is true; he was partial towards Ayesha (RA) as far as his feelings were concerned. Hence his prayer, " O Allah! I try to be fair in matters which are in my control (meaning money, time and gifts) but forgive me for that which is beyond my control (meaning love for Ayesha)."[12]

Once, when his wives pressurized the Prophet (SAW) for increase in their monthly allowance (which was not an unjustified request on their part as the economic situation of the Ummah had improved and they were still on a meager allowance), Allah revealed the verses which allowed the wives to either part with the Prophet (SAW) or stay with him under the same stringent conditions. In this regard, the Prophet (SAW)

consulted Ayesha (RA) first, advising her not to give a hasty reply and to consult her parents too. Without any hesitation, Ayesha chose to stay with the Prophet (SAW) and added that there was no need for any consultation. The other wives also gave the same reply.

Her Education

Ayesha (RA) received her early education at the hands of her noble father Abu Bakr Siddique. She had inherited a love for poetry, history and genealogy, besides receiving religious education. At a very tender age, she was married to the Prophet (SAW). Proper education therefore started after her marriage. Her memory was so startling that she remembered childhood events exactly as they took place – till the very end of her lifetime.

Whenever she used to hear any verses of the Quran from her parents, she used to commit them to her memory. She relates that when the following verse of Surah Qamar was revealed, "Albeit the Hour is their promised time, And the Hour will be calamitous and bitter" (54:46), she was playing at that time.

In Arabia, education was not a common phenomenon and even more rare was the woman who was literate. Ayesha (RA) had learnt how to read, and she used to read the Quran. One tradition observes that she knew how to write as well. She used to answer her letters herself. She was also interested in learning the Tib method of Alternate Medicine (which was in practice in those days). There was no formal education of Tib, but she used to put in her memory bank all the medicines prescribed for various illnesses by the Tib doctors.

Besides regular knowledge of worldly subjects, the religious education of Ayesha (RA) was continuously taking place. Her house opened at one end into Masjid-e-Nabvi. She was minutely aware of all the discourses being conducted there.

Plus, Ayesha's nature was such that she would keep on questioning the Prophet (SAW) till she was satisfied. He never used to feel irritated at her inquisitiveness and used to encourage her quest for truth. The books of Hadiths are filled with examples of these sessions between Ayesha (RA) and the Prophet (SAW). It is not practically possible to mention them all, but we would like to relate some instances from which the reader can gather Ayesha's immense thirst for religious knowledge.

Once a Jewish woman came to Ayesha's house. She spoke about the torment of the grave and prayed that Allah should protect Ayesha (RA) from the same. Ayesha asked the Prophet (SAW) about the torment of the grave. He affirmed that there would be punishment in the grave. Ayesha says that after this incident the Prophet (SAW) did not say a single prayer without asking Allah for refuge from the suffering in the grave.[13]

Once she asked the Prophet (SAW), "O Rasool Allah! Some predictions of the foretellers come out to be true," He replied, "These true things are grasped by the Jinn who relate it to the soothsayers and they add embellishments to them."[14]

Once a man wanted to meet the Prophet (SAW). He said, "Let him come in, he is the black sheep of his family." When he came and sat inside, the Prophet (SAW) gave him his undivided attention. When he left, Ayesha (RA) was surprised and inquired, "O Rasool Allah! You do not consider him to be a good person. But when he came, you spoke to him in such a courteous manner." The Prophet (SAW) replied, "He is the worst kind of man who people avoid because of his bad manners."[15]

Besides day-to-day affairs, she used to get information about historical events and famous personalities. Once she questioned Prophet (SAW) about Abdullah Bin Jadaan who was a kindhearted and generous chief of the Quraish, but a

disbeliever. Ayesha (RA) asked, “O Rasool Allah! Abdullah Bin Jadaan used to be generous to his people in the days of ignorance, and he used to feed the poor. Will his good deeds benefit him at all?” The Holy Prophet (SAW) replied, “No Ayesha! Not for a single day did he pray to his Lord for forgiveness on the Day of Judgment.”[16]

After the Battle of Uhud, she asked the Prophet (SAW) one day, “O Prophet of Allah! Was any day more severe on you than the day of Uhud?” She got the reply, “I have suffered much at the hands of your people, and the most anguish I felt was on the day of Uqba.” Then he proceeded to relate the incident that took place in Taif.

Besides the Taif episode, the details of the migration of the Prophet (SAW) also reached us through Ayesha (RA). Indeed she must have heard of the incident from her father who had accompanied the Prophet (SAW) on this journey.

Besides regular question and answer sessions, Ayesha (RA) also recorded in her memory every action of the Prophet (SAW), every word uttered by him, his explanations about daily happenings, and his ways of worship. The deep thirst for knowledge, a keen mind, a sensitive and inquiring nature, and loads of self-confidence paved the way for Ayesha’s comprehensive education. Any lack was compensated for by the constant guidance of the Prophet (SAW) and his keen attention towards her.

Her Upbringing

The Prophet (SAW) gave special importance to the education and upbringing of his young wife, knowing what a remarkable intellect she possessed. It has been seen usually that social reformers who impact the lives of thousands of people often neglect their own household who remain deprived of the benefit of their teachings. It is rightly said that there are shadows

beneath the light.

Ayesha (RA) states, “It was a habit of the Prophet (SAW) that when he used to come home, he used to say in a loud voice, ‘If you add two plains of riches to the wealth of Adam, he will covet a third. Only ashes thrown on his face can end his greed for more. Allah says that He has given wealth to mankind so that they can remember Him and they should help the needy. Allah turns to those who turn to Him.’ ”[17]

The Prophet (SAW) used to give brief but useful advice, always appropriate to the occasion. Hazrat Ayesha (RA) was an avid student of theology and it had been made very clear to her by the Prophet (SAW) that every man had to strive to do his own good deeds and any relation or nearness to the Prophet (SAW) would be of no benefit in the Hereafter. Once Ayesha (RA) burst into tears upon remembering the torment of the Fire. The Prophet (SAW) asked her why she was crying. She answered that she had recalled Hellfire and thus started crying, and also asked him if he would remember his family members on the day of Judgment. The Prophet (SAW) replied, “On three occasions no one will remember any one. The first, when we are near the balance – till we find out whether our side is heavy or light; the second, when we will be told to come and read our books – till we find out where we will receive our book – in our right or left hand or from behind our back; and the third, when we cross the Pul Sarat.”[18]

Ayesha (RA) was the beloved of the Prophet (SAW). In spite of that, whenever he used to feel that she was in the wrong, he used to lightly admonish her. Once a belonging of hers got stolen and she started to curse the thief. The Prophet (SAW) stated, “Don’t lessen the thief’s punishment!”[19] Meaning to say that laying curses on the thief would lessen his torment and decrease her blessing. Hence, it is better to exercise patience.

Once a few Jews came to the Prophet (SAW). They greeted him

by saying ‘Assamu alaikum’ On the face of it, they were offering the traditional greeting, but actually they were wishing death on the Prophet (SAW) as the Arabic word ‘Sam’ means death. The Prophet (SAW) replied, “Walaikum” (Meaning same to you). Hazrat Ayesha got upset and retorted, “Death to you and all terrible things!” The Prophet (SAW) chided her, “O Ayesha! Verily Allah takes gentleness as His ally in all matters.” She reminded him of what the Jews had said. He replied, “I also returned their greeting in the same spirit.”[20] (Meaning whatever they said was turned back onto them).

One of the Prophet’s (SAW) wives, Safia, was a bit short in stature. One day Ayesha (RA) remarked, “O Rasool Allah! Stop it! Safia is so short!” He chided, “You said such a thing that if it were to be added to the waters of the ocean, it would blend with it.” (Meaning it would contaminate the entire ocean water). Ayesha was surprised, “O Rasool Allah (SAW)! I merely stated a truth about a person.” She got the reply, “If I am given a bit of this and that, I would never relate it.”[21] (Meaning to say this is a big sin and even if he got a big amount of money for it, he would never say those words).

Ayesha thus received her moral training at the hands of the Prophet (SAW) through guidance, mild rebukes and corrections. She usually joined the Prophet (SAW) in his supererogatory worship and also received practical guidance at every step.

The Event of Ifk

The hypocrites of Medina were in a constant state of agitation; their purpose being to cause destruction to the Muslims. On the political and military fronts, their efforts bore no fruit. So they turned their attention to the inside happenings in Medina and used to come up with new schemes every now and then. At times, they tried to generate a conflict between the Migrants (Muhajirin) and the Helpers (Ansars). They would also try to create differences among the Ansar tribes. Till now they had no

success in their ploys. But soon, nature gave them a chance to transform an ordinary event into the vilest slander and thus they got a chance to destroy the moral fiber of Muslim society in Medina that was in the infant stage.

In the Battle of Bani Mustalaq Ayesha (RA) had accompanied the Prophet (SAW). She had borrowed a necklace from her sister. At some point, when the troops broke their journey, she went a bit far to answer the call of nature and her necklace accidentally slipped off somewhere. On returning to her palanquin, she found the ornament missing and went off to find it. Meanwhile, the camp moved on, and did not notice the absence of Ayesha as she was very lightweight and her palanquin did not feel different. When Ayesha (RA) returned to the spot after finding the piece of jewelry, the party had moved on. The sensible thing was to wait there till someone would come back to fetch her. She sat on the ground and dozed off, wrapping her cloak around her.

Safwan Bin Maatal, a companion of the Prophet (SAW), had been following the armed forces at a distance so that he could pick up anything left behind them by mistake. He caught sight of Ayesha (RA) and recognized her, as he had seen her before the Verses of the Veil had been revealed. He started reciting 'Inna Lillah' so that she got up startled. Safwan gathered that she had gotten separated from the rest of the party somehow. He made his camel sit and Ayesha got onto it.

At the other end, when the troops came to rest at a point, they were surprised to see Ayesha (RA) proceeding towards them on a camel being led by Safwan. It was hardly something disturbing, but before the situation could be explained, the leader of the hypocrites, Abdullah Bin Ubai started to spread false propaganda. He used to go and whisper in the ears of different people that, God forbid, Ayesha (RA) was no longer a virtuous woman. The hypocrites had at last found the perfect

opportunity to create a furor among the Muslim camps.

The malicious gossip against Ayesha (RA) proved to be another major trial for the Prophet (SAW). As expected, most of the Muslims did not believe in the rumors that were being circulated, but some weak-minded believers did fall prey to them. The matter concerned that Prophet's (SAW) own household and was so delicate that it could not be raised up in public. One day Ayesha (RA), who until then was oblivious to what was happening around her, got wind of the scandal. Her mind reeled in utter shock that people could stoop so low as to falsely accuse her of all people of such a heinous sin. Her parents confirmed the rumors when she went to visit them. Both of them tried to console her, but they could not succeed in lessening her anguish. She contracted severe fever and came to live with her parents after taking permission from the Prophet (SAW). She was in the grip of immense mental tension and trauma, and every day was fresh agony to her. Her nights were sleepless with worry.

The Prophet (SAW) was beset with a dilemma himself; while he believed that Ayesha was innocent, he wanted witnesses to the truth and a strong proof of the innocence of his wife so that the matter could be dispelled forever without any further consequences. He consulted Hazrat Usama and Hazrat Ali in this matter. The former strongly pleaded the case of Ayesha (RA) and took the view that she was innocent. Ali, looking at the agitated condition of the Prophet, suggested that there was no dearth of suitable women for the Prophet (SAW). He also suggested that her maid should be asked about her character.

The maidservant was called and questioned about Ayesha (RA). She did not really understand the matter and said, "There is no other bad quality in her except that she is young, she goes to sleep and the goat eats up the flour." When explained the gravity of the situation, she was shocked, "Subhanallah! I know

her as well as a goldsmith recognizes pure gold!"

A whole long month had passed when the Prophet (SAW) visited Abu Bakr's house. He spoke to his wife, "O Ayesha! I have received such and such news about you. If you are innocent, then Allah will soon reveal your innocence. If you have sinned, you must repent and ask for forgiveness. When a sinner repents and asks for forgiveness, Allah forgives him."[22]

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) listened to his words in silence. Then she asked her mother and father to plead her case. Both gave her a helpless look because they did not know what to say. Finally, she stood up for herself and uttered the words that are so famous in Islamic history, "By God! If I say I have not committed any sin, it would not make any difference, and if I say that I have committed a sin, you people will believe that I have admitted my mistake, when God knows I am innocent. I know of no better words than what the father of Yusuf (AS) uttered 'I will acquire the best of patience and Allah is my supporter against what you are saying.'"

As soon as she finished her little speech, Allah sent down His Holy verses from above the seven heavens and absolved her of any blame. He stated her innocence and elevated her to the enviable position that Muslims till the Last Day will read these verses in the Quran and Ayesha (RA) will be remembered as a pure and chaste woman.

Ayesha – A Widow

Ayesha (RA) was 18 years old and had been married for only nine years when the Prophet (SAW) contracted a terminal disease. As was his habit, he used to spend one night with each of his wives. But he regularly used to ask where he would spend the next night. The wives understood that he wanted to spend his remaining time with Ayesha. They readily gave up their

rights to make him feel at ease.

Thus he came to be stationed in the room of Ayesha (RA). His condition got steadily worse. Ayesha got fully involved in nursing him day and night. She used to recite the same prayers and blow over him as she had seen him do for other sick people. Now the end had come. The Prophet (SAW) was resting against Ayesha (RA), when Abdur Rahman (RA) walked in with a miswak. When the Prophet (SAW) looked longingly at the miswak, Ayesha understood what he desired; she softened it for him by chewing on it and gently gave it to him. In a few moments, he pulled his hand from Ayesha's hand and said, "Allahumma Rafeequl Aala!"[23] (Allah is the best friend). A few minutes had passed when Ayesha felt his body to be heavy; she glanced at his eyes to find them wide open. Gently she laid down his head on the pillow and started to sob.

The Prophet (SAW) was buried in the same little room which was the house of Ayesha (RA).

Ayesha – The Teacher of the Ummah

After becoming a widow, Ayesha (RA) did not give in to wailing and lamenting, nor did she talk endlessly about the Prophet (SAW) with whomever she met. She threw her heart and soul in the education of the Ummah in the ways of the Sunnah and the understanding of Deen. Her mind was imprinted with the treasures of the Prophetic knowledge by being his constant companion; now she wanted to transmit it to the Ummah. Her room became the first madrassah in the world for the education of Hadith.

The correct transmission of the hadith became the focus of her existence. The first part of her life was spent in learning the religion from the Prophet (SAW) and the rest she wanted to spend in spreading her knowledge. She did such a good job that she is considered among the foremost hadith-relaters till today.

Only five companions topped her in the number of Hadiths related. In the books of hadith, 2,210 traditions are attributed to her. Out of these, 285 are included in the books of Muslim and Bukhari, the rest are present in other books. Her Ahadith in the book of Imam Hanbal are enough to be compiled into a separate book.

During the Caliphate of Abu Bakr, Ayesha (RA) was considered quite an expert in religious matters. Even Hazrat Umar during his caliphate used to consult Ayesha on different issues. He himself had been a close companion of the Prophet (SAW), well versed in the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW), and strict in adherence of principles in the compilation of Ahadith. Hazrat Amir Muaviyah, during his caliphate, used to send messengers from Damascus to ask Ayesha about different matters. The famous hadith-relater Masrooq swears that he saw eminent companions flock to Ayesha's house to consult her opinion. She achieved so much distinction in the science of Hadith and Fiqh that men, women and young boys used to flock to her residence in search of the truth. The reason behind this was that Ayesha (RA) was a truly remarkable woman; she had special qualities, which marked her as no ordinary scholar.

Depth of Knowledge and Insight

Destiny had great plans for Ayesha (RA) who proved to be a blessing for the Muslim Ummah. Besides possessing an amazing memory, she had the capability of getting to the crux of the matter, be it a legal matter or a political one. She also used to evaluate issues from every angle; thus her depth of knowledge was stunning. We can see from some examples what a truly remarkable mind she possessed.

Once when she heard the tradition related by Abdullah Bin Umar (RA) and Abu Saeed Khudri (RA) that the Prophet (SAW) had advised sacrificial meat to be consumed within three days, she refuted the tradition in these words, "We used to

marinate the meat with salt and leave it, and present the same to the Prophet (SAW) in Medina. The Prophet (SAW) said, 'Do not eat it after three days.' This was definitely not an order, but he wanted the people to share the meat with others."

Hazrat Ayesha was very concerned about conveying the exact words of the Quran and the Hadiths along with their context so that people would understand the logic and wisdom behind the Islamic injunctions. Hence whenever she heard of a tradition without any reference to the context and there was danger of it being misinterpreted, she used to step forward to clear the misconception.

She corrected the following Hadith related by Abdullah Bin Umar and Abdullah Bin Abbas, "The Prophet (SAW) said that the dead body is tormented by the wailing of its family." Ayesha refused to accept these words and argued that the Prophet (SAW) had never said something like that. The actual incident was that once he happened to pass by a dead Jew. His family was loudly lamenting his death. He stated, " They wail over him and he is in torment." She further said, "The Quran is sufficient for you, And Allah says that no other shall bear the burden of another."

Hence Ayesha (RA) not only corrected the mistake but also stated an important rule to adhere to while judging the veracity of a Hadith. She set right a number of hadiths narrated by eminent Companions, which were misunderstood because of sticking to just the literal meaning without understanding their context. She never hesitated in stating her difference of opinion against the judgment of trusted scholarly Companions. She used to forward such logical and sound proofs to back her decisions that others had no choice but to accept her viewpoint.

Acquaintance with Sunnah and Deep Understanding of the Prophet's (SAW) Disposition

Ayesha (RA) spent a considerable amount of time with the Prophet (SAW). She understood his personality very well. She had a constant eye on the religious commandments and the wisdom behind them, therefore she recognized why the Prophet (SAW) had issued certain orders and on what grounds. Also, she knew which of his Sunnah had a religious connotation and which were just personal to him and not recommended as a means for earning reward.

Some Companions like Ibne Abbas (RA) have termed all the Sunnah acts as meritorious – whether personal or otherwise, and he doggedly followed these to the last, right down to the smallest act that the Prophet (SAW) had executed during his expeditions. If the Prophet (SAW) had performed ablution without reason at a certain point, he would follow suit. As opposed to this, Ayesha classified as Sunnah only those acts which had been encouraged or ordered by the Prophet (SAW) for the purpose of earning reward. Once when there was an argument over whether it was a Sunnah to stop at Ibtah during Hajj proceedings, she answered, "It is not a Sunnah to stop at Ibtah. The only reason the Prophet (SAW) stopped there was because it was easy for him to proceed from that place."

Ayesha (RA) used to deduce intelligent conclusions because of her close acquaintance with the personality of the Prophet (SAW). She used to ascertain what would have been the stance of the Prophet (SAW) in such and such a situation, had he been alive. The Prophet (SAW) had allowed women to come to the mosque and had specifically asked men not to bar them from entering the places of worship. In the later years, when women's behavior changed for the worse with time and conditions, Ayesha used to remark, "If the Prophet (SAW) had been alive today and observed the condition of the Muslim

women, he would have forbidden women from the mosque, just like the Jewish women had been stopped earlier."

The Interpretation of the Quran and Command over Arabic Language

The Quran had been revealed in Arabic. The Companions being Arabs well understood the Book. In linguistic terms though, a few had superiority over others. Ayesha (RA) was one of them. She was an expert in written and spoken Arabic and was an eloquent speaker. She well understood the idiomatic phrases, day-to-day usage and poetic nuances of the Arabic script. Hence she was proficient at the elucidation of the Quranic verses.

Once her nephew Urwa asked about the Quranic verse, 'The hills of Safa and Marvah are among the signs of the Lord, so whosoever performs Hajj or Umrah of the Kaaba, there is no harm if he ambulates between them.' It appeared to him from this verse that there was no harm if one did not do the rounds between Safa and Marwah. Ayesha told him that he was in the wrong. If this had been the meaning, the Quranic verse would have run as follows, 'If you don't do the ambulation between them, there is no harm.' Then she expounded that these verses were revealed for the Ansar. The Awz and Khizraj tribes before converting to Islam used to proclaim, "Long live Manat" and used to find it sinful to do the rounds of Safa and Marwah. After Islam, they sought clarification of this matter from the Prophet (SAW) and so Allah revealed these verses to make clear the relevant action. When Abu Bakr Bin Abdur Rahman (RA) heard of this illumination thrown on this Ayah by Ayesha, he marveled that truly that was knowledge.

Caution in Acceptance of Hadith

Mother of the Believers, Ayesha (RA) was extremely meticulous while passing on a tradition of the Prophet (SAW) and used to relate the context as well so there would be no place

for distortion. At the same time, she was circumspect about accepting any Hadith. If she heard the tradition from a third source, she would check with the original Companion who had narrated it. If a person came to inquire about a tradition that was not her own, she used to send him to the original source. The purpose was to eliminate third party information transfer in order to increase the conviction of the Hadith.

She wanted to guide the Ummah towards the truth. In spite of her profound knowledge of religion, if she felt that someone could better satisfy the inquirer, she used to pass him on to that person. One person asked about rubbing hands over the socks in wuzu, she sent him to Ali (RA) because he had traveled more often with the Prophet (SAW).

Ayesha's Home-School

The Prophet (SAW) had inculcated in his Companions a thirst for knowledge and a keen desire for its propagation. As time passed, a few Companions died soon after the Prophet (SAW). Some attained martyrdom in the various battles fought and some got busy in governing the different conquered territories. Several of them migrated to other cities. In the city of Medina, Hazrat Abdullah Bin Umar (RA), Hazrat Abdullah Bin Abbas (RA), Hazrat Abu Huraira (RA) and Hazrat Ayesha (RA) were the outstanding personalities who dedicated their lives to the spread of religious education.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) rose to eminence in Medina because of her exceptional scholastic aptitude and dedication to the cause of Islam. Among those who flocked to her cabin were prominent Companions as well as common people who wanted a practical solution to their ordinary problems. Women, young boys and mehram men were regulars inside her room, the rest used to sit in Masjid-e-Nabvi outside her door. There used to be a curtain at the door. This room was the centre of spiritual discourses.

Some of Ayesha's nephews and nieces achieved fame as Islamic scholars in later years due to her guidance and teaching. Notable among the nephews are Qasim Bin Abdullah, Abdullah Bin Mohammad, Abu Salam, Urwah Bin Zubair, Qasim Bin Zubair. Among her nieces, Hafsa Bint Abdur Rahman, Asma Bint Abdur Rahman and Ayesha Bint Talha became renowned for their knowledge of Islam.

Besides routine sessions at this home-school, Hajj was the time when Ayesha's tent would be swamped with students and ordinary questioners. All the pilgrims had access to her vast reservoir of knowledge. Especially women used to swarm around her like bees. They used to come to her for their various difficulties and she used to give them a befitting response.

Supporting of Right and Denouncing of Wrong

When Ayesha (RA) gave sermons, she used to deliver talks and discourses to suit the occasion. She used to dislike talking about religion all the time and used to advise her students to be sensible and wise while preaching. Yes, she was particular about her duty of encouraging right and the prohibition of wrong. She was particularly watchful over the conduct and character of those who had a close association with her.

Once Hafsa Bint Abdur Rahman, her niece, came to her house wearing a transparent dupatta. Angrily, Ayesha tore the offending head cover to pieces. Then she reprimanded her niece, "Are you unaware of the injunctions given by Allah in Surah-e-Noor?"

On another occasion she chanced to see her brother Abdur Rahman Bin Abi Bakr (RA) do his ablutions hastily and she told him, "Abdur Rahman! Perform your ablutions properly. I heard the Prophet (SAW) say that the parts of the body which don't get wet properly in wuzu are engulfed by the Hell-fire."[24]

Ayesha in the Battlefield

Ayesha (RA) used to care deeply about the Muslim Ummah. She used to keep herself abreast of the political changes in the Muslim empire and relentlessly tried to perform her duty of advising good and admonishing evil. During the caliphate of Abu Bakr (RA), the political atmosphere was peaceful after the apostates had been defeated. Constant victories of the Muslims contributed to a high morale. Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) and subsequently Hazrat Umar (RA) had acquired total control over the economic and political matters of state. They were far-sighted and used to quell any trouble in its initial stage before it became a threat to the Muslim Ummah. The early years of Hazrat Usman's (RA) rule were also free from any strife. Towards the end of his caliphate though, a lot of prominent Companions had departed from the world, borders of the Muslim state had spread out considerably and conquering the non-Arab territories had created differences between Arabs and non-Arabs. Some mutinous elements rose to the forefront that wanted to spread mischief in the empire and divide it into fragments.

The founder of the Sabai sect, Ibne Saba who was originally a Jew, was successful in collecting around him those Muslims who for personal gain or tribal loyalty were willing to put the state in political turmoil. This group charged Usman (RA) with nepotism and his governors with false accusations and created havoc in the state. Usman (RA) tried his best to reconcile with these elements and even answered all their bogus allegations. But these rebels were bent on creating disorder in the ranks of the Muslims. Taking advantage of Usman's kind and lax nature, they infiltrated into Medina. The Companions tried to calm the miscreants down. But the dissidents wanted to remove Usman (RA) from the caliphate, which was not an acceptable solution. Eventually they surrounded Usman's house and kept him prisoner, and after a few days mercilessly murdered him. Under

very uneasy and tense circumstances, the majority of the citizens of Medina including the rebels gave pledge to Hazrat Ali (RA) and he became the fourth Caliph of the Muslim empire.

Hazrat Zubair (RA) and Hazrat Talha (RA) were trusted companions of the Prophet (SAW) and among those ten who had been promised paradise during his lifetime. They had sworn loyalty to Hazrat Ali, but the rebels who were roaming around freely disturbed them. They wanted an immediate arrest of the murderers of Usman, which did not seem imminent. Hence, one day, in the cover of the night, they left for Mecca. On the way, they met Ayesha (RA) who was on her way home after performing the Hajj. She had received the alarming news of Usman's assassination. They both apprised her of the turbulence and dissensions in Medina.

Whoever met Ayesha (RA) in the next few days would relate more tales of turmoil and strife in the Prophet's (SAW) city. The leaders of the dissentions who were the cause of the murder of Usman till yesterday, played up to Ali to win his sympathy in order to avoid blame and punishment. It was not easy to identify these assailants. In the discussions that followed between Ayesha, Talha and Zubair, it was decided unanimously that Usman's killers would have to pay blood money immediately. Otherwise, if the assassination of such a noteworthy Caliph would be left ignored, the Islamic empire would be in shambles.

A brother of Ayesha (RA), Mohammad Bin Abi Bakr was also involved in the cold-hearted killing of the respected Caliph, and he was also one of the many who broke into his house. Ayesha did not give any importance to her blood ties, and focused her attention on saving the repute of the Caliphate.

Ayesha (RA) appealed to the Muslim masses to come forward and take revenge for Usman's massacre. Her fiery speeches had a profound impact on the people. Hordes of Muslims came to

join her in her march to Medina for justice. On the way they changed their direction towards Basra because the majority of the people felt that more supporters should be enlisted in the army from Basra, Kufa and Iraq. During the journey, they passed the lake of Hawwab. The dogs here started barking at the commotion. Hazrat Ayesha (RA) suddenly remembered a prediction of the Prophet (SAW) according to which the dogs of Hawwab would bark at one of his wives.[25] She was stunned that she was the one referred to. She immediately decided to turn back and give up her whole plan of action against the Caliphate. Some people swore to her that this place was not Hawwab. Hazrat Zubair was astonished that after coming this far, Ayesha (RA) wanted to back out. He convinced her by saying that perhaps Allah wanted to make peace among the Muslim factions through her.

When the camp reached Basra, Ayesha (RA) held talks with the nobles and elite in the city; some sided with her and some decided to remain neutral. There ensued an argument between the supporters of Ayesha and the governor of Basra, Usman Bin Hanif. Ayesha constantly advised them to remain calm and patient, and tried to explain that the whole purpose behind the campaign was to establish peace and safety in the Muslim empire.

In the meanwhile, some hostile elements among the opponents attacked Ayesha's camp. The spokesperson for Ayesha beseeched the enemies to stop fighting but they would not listen. Finally, to save their own skins, Ayesha's army also fought back and the battle began. The skirmish ended with the peace seekers as the successful ones and Ayesha (RA) gained controlled of Basra.

The Battle of the Camel

Hazrat Ali (RA) was apprised of the expedition against the Caliphate. He left Medina with 700 men, and another 7,000

joined him from Kufa. By the time he reached Basra, he had gathered a force of 20,000 men. Ayesha (RA) was stationed in Basra with 3,000 soldiers. To prevent the two sides from warfare, the impartial Muslims tried to bring about reconciliation and both the parties agreed to come to an understanding. No one wanted two Muslim armies to shed each other's blood. The matter seemed to be resolved and it appeared as if the condition of the Muslim state would stabilize.

The rebels present in both parties knew that if there were a peaceful settlement, then they would be taken to task. They made a silent attack in the dark of the night on Ayesha's army. In the state of confusion that ensued, no one knew who was the instigator; both parties thought they had been deceived. Ayesha (RA) climbed into her iron howdah and Ali (RA) climbed his mount. Both tried to stop their armies from fighting, but things had veered out of control and the battle had started in earnest.

Ayesha's howdah was in the thick of the battle and the command of the army was under Talha (RA) and Zubair (RA). In the heat of the battle, Ali (RA) told Zubair, "O Abu Abdullah! Do you remember the day when the Prophet (SAW) asked you if you took Ali as a friend and you replied in the affirmative? Then the Prophet (SAW) told you that one day you would fight with him in the wrong." Zubair (RA) recalled this incident and full of remorse, he left the battle immediately saying that Ali should have reminded him earlier. He asked his son Abdullah bin Zubair to do the same but he refused. With a weary heart, he left the scene of the battle by himself but unfortunately some miscreant murdered him on the way.

Talha (RA) had also by now realized the error of his decision and he wanted to separate himself from the battle, but the conspirators got wind of his intentions and shot a poisoned arrow at him, which resulted in his martyrdom. Now only Ayesha (RA) was left in charge of the force. Her supporters had

surrounded her howdah and were bravely defending her with their lives. Ali (RA) gave orders to cut off her camel's legs, because he realized that the senseless slaughter of Muslims would go on as long as Ayesha (RA) was in the howdah. As soon as the camel of Ayesha (RA) fell, her soldiers lost all hope because their morale was already down after the loss of Zubair and Talha. The battle ended in favour of Ali (RA).

Soon after the battle, Ali (RA) sent Ayesha's brother to ask her how she was feeling. He also proclaimed general amnesty for all. Then he visited Ayesha (RA) himself and expressed his desire for her well-being. She replied that she was fine. After taking care of her needs for a few days, he bade her farewell, and dispatched to go with her to Medina her brother and some other respectable women. He personally came to see her off for some distance. When parting, Ayesha (RA) expressed her sorrow and anguish at the terrible state of events that had taken place. She said that she had no bad feelings for Ali (RA) – neither now nor in the past; except some petty issues that used to arise occasionally between the mother-in-law and the son-in-law. Ali (RA) also uttered words of respect and praise for her and the group left for Medina.

Ayesha (RA) always regretted her decision to go to war with Ali (RA). She was never comfortable with the role she had played in the circumstances. She used to remember this incident and speak out in regret, "I wish I were a stone, or a tree!" And when she used to read the verse, "O wives of the Prophet (SAW)! Stay quietly within your homes," she used to weep until her scarf would be soaked with tears.

After this event she once again started to take active part in teaching and educating the Muslim masses in the matters of religion.

Ayesha's Death

In her 66th year Ayesha (RA) fell seriously ill and people came to visit her to inquire about her health. When asked how she felt she used to say she was fine, but she knew that she would not recover from this illness. The daughter of Abu Bakr (RA), the beloved wife of the Prophet (SAW) and one of the best Islamic scholars ever – was so anxious about her fate in the hereafter that she used to say, "I wish I was a stone, I wish I was a herb in a forest."

Ibne Abbas visited her in her last days and mentioned her achievements but she replied, "Ibne Abbas! Relieve me of these tributes. I would be happy not existing." He tried to make her feel better and reassured her that she was about to join the truthful ones (referring to the Prophet (SAW) and Abu Bakr).

Before breathing her last, she made a will to the effect that she should be buried in Jannat-ul-Baqi along with the other wives of the Prophet (SAW). Somebody remarked that she should be buried in her room along with the Prophet (SAW) and his two illustrious companions. Her reply to this was, "In that case I'll have to let go of my previous deeds and start afresh." (meaning she was not fit to be buried alongside with them).

On the 17th of Ramadan, 58 Hijri, in the last days of the rule of Amir Muaviyah, Ayesha (RA) joined her Lord after breathing her last. According to her will, her last rituals were performed immediately and preparations were made for the burial. On hearing of her death, the women of Medina rushed to her house. There were so many people in her funeral procession that people commented that they had never seen such a big procession in the dark of the night. Abu Hurairah led her Namaz-e-Janaza. Her nephews lowered her into her grave in Al-Baqi.

There was mourning in Medina when people got the news of

her death. They were so stricken with grief at her loss that when a dweller of Medina was asked about her bereavement, he replied, “All those were affected by her passing away who considered her as their mother.”

Ayesha’s High Stature And Unique Qualities

Ayesha (RA) was an exemplary character in the whole Muslim Ummah on the basis of her outstanding personality and achievements. She was born in the cradle of Islam and had never been under the shadow of disbelief. She had an extraordinary father in Abu Bakr (RA), who was the first to accept Islam among men and the closest friend of the Prophet (SAW). When Ayesha (RA) was betrothed to the Prophet (SAW), this bond was further strengthened. Before this, the Prophet (SAW) had seen a dream in which Gabriel had presented Ayesha’s picture wrapped in silk to him and informed him that she was to be his wife in this world and the Hereafter. [26] She was the only wife of the Prophet (SAW) who had not been married before.

She was proud to be the beloved wife of the Prophet (SAW). When returning from the Battle of Silasil, Hazrat Amr Bin Aas asked the Prophet (SAW) whom he loved more than anyone on earth. Without any hesitation the Prophet (SAW) said, “Ayesha”. Amr insisted that he wanted to know his preference among men. The Prophet (SAW) replied, “Ayesha’s father.”[27]

The story of the love of the Prophet (SAW) for Ayesha (RA) was so well known that people used to present their gifts to the Prophet (SAW) when it was Ayesha’s turn. The other wives were not too pleased when they noticed this and after consulting with each other, they sent Umme Salamah to request the Prophet (SAW) to tell people to not be specific about a particular wife’s turn when sending their gifts. Umme Salamah presented this appeal before her husband, who disregarded the

issue. At the next instance, when she again approached the same issue, the Prophet (SAW) again ignored her. The third time, he frankly told her, “O Umme Salamah! Do not bother me in the matter of Ayesha. Allah is a witness! Besides Ayesha’s bed, revelation does not come to me when I am with any one of you.”[28]

Ayesha (RA) also confirmed that angels used to come to and go from her house, and she used to be lying with the Prophet (SAW) in the same blanket, when the revelations used to come. Once the Prophet (SAW) told her, “O Ayesh! Gabriel is here and he conveys you salaam.” She also greeted him. And further added that the Prophet (SAW) could glimpse what any other human being could not.[29]

Ayesha (RA) has the distinction of being the cause of several revelations that proved to be of immense benefit to the Ummah. Once while accompanying the Prophet (SAW) on a battle, Ayesha had worn a necklace that she had borrowed from her sister. Incidentally she dropped it on the way. The Prophet (SAW) sent some companions to look for it. The time for prayer approached and because of lack of water, these companions said their prayers without ablution. When they informed the Prophet (SAW) about what they had done, the verses about Tayammum were revealed. Usaid Bin Huzair said, “May Allah bless you for this gift! Allah is a witness that whenever you have undergone a trial, He has revealed verses to help you out and has simultaneously provided a blessing for the Muslim Ummah.”[30]

Previously, when the hypocrites accused Ayesha (RA) of being unchaste, Allah had revealed verses that proved her innocence in the Quran, which will be read by Muslims till the Day of Judgment and which provided a relief and safeguard for innocent, chaste Muslim women for all times to come.

Another event occurred at the time of Hajj. When Ayesha (RA)

reached Mecca, her menstruation commenced and she started to cry. The Prophet (SAW) asked her to don the ahram for Hajj instead of Umrah and to complete the rituals of Hajj apart from Tawaaf and Saee. Afterwards, he sent her brother Abdur Rahman (RA) with her, some distance away, to a place called Tan'eem where she again entered the state of ahram and then completed her Umrah.[31]

In this way, a very important issue concerning women was addressed. This is a very common occurrence at pilgrimage time and was a matter of great relief for Muslim women. Today, we find a mosque called Masjid-e-Ayesha at Tan'eem and till today people go there to commence their Umrah.

When the Prophet (SAW) was overcome with disease at the end of his life, he used to continue to give turns to his wives, as was his normal practice. But he used to inquire where he would spend the next night, as he wanted to spend his remaining time with Ayesha (RA). She related that when he came to reside in her house, he became more relaxed and peaceful.[32]

Ayesha (RA) used to be proud of the fact that in his last days, the Prophet (SAW) drank from the same vessel where her mouth had touched it. None of his other spouses enjoyed this blessing. After that, he died with his head in Ayesha's lap and he was buried in her room.

Ayehsa (RA) had dreamt before his death that three moons had descended into her house. She mentioned this to her father. When the Prophet (SAW) was buried in her room, he remarked, "This is one of those moons and he is the best of them." This was a big honour for Ayesha because every Muslim carries in his heart the desire to pay homage to the Prophet's (SAW) grave, which is none other but the room of Ayesha (RA).

We have mentioned earlier that when she was still a child, Gabriel had brought her picture wrapped in silk to the Prophet

(SAW), and informed him that she was to be his wife in this life and the Hereafter. Ayesha wanted further confirmation than this so she asked the Prophet (SAW) who would be his wives in Jannah. He understood the question and replied, "You are one of them."[33]

Ayesha's superiority also stems from the fact that one-fourth of religion reached us through Ayesha. She is rightly the biggest scholar among Muslim women. The Prophet (SAW) stated, "Among men there have been many great ones, but among women, leaving aside Mariam Bint Imran, and Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, no great women was born. The superiority of Ayesha over women is like that of Thurid over other foods."[34]

A Role Model for Muslim Women for All Times to Come

Ayesha's life is a perfect ideal for Muslim women to emulate. It reminds us that the responsibility of a woman is not only in the capacity of a housewife. Besides performing her domestic chores, she can play an active role in the improvement and reformation of the society.

Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi holds in his book Women and Service to Islam that a number of verses in the Quran point to women's role in education, service of Islam, co-operation in works of charity and building of a sound society. The Quran does not differentiate between men and women in terms of good deeds. Usually when a good quality of a Momin is mentioned in the Quran, extra words are added to include women as well. These qualities are not just related to matters of worship, but include different fields and matters.

Believers of other faiths and philosophies do not equate men with women and cannot fathom that women have the same capabilities as men. These minds have always biased against women and have excluded women from many fields. They have

not accepted the equality between the two sexes, let alone admitting the superiority of women in many cases.

To take the discussion further, we admit that it is obvious that women are not physically endowed with the same strength as men, but they have been given the same senses, hands and feet, memory and brainpower. These are the faculties which when used properly lead to the achievement of different skills and expertise. And then comes the recognition according to the level of work performed. Often women have complained that their husbands don't consult them in decision-making. Women should realize that Allah has not given them innumerable faculties merely to impress their in-laws and others, or to while away their time running around in shopping malls. Their abilities should not be wasted on a frivolous lifestyle. Yes, if they themselves don't want to be a productive part of the society, then they deserve the treatment they get.

Today's woman has succeeded in getting equal rights with men to a certain extent, thanks to the women's liberation movement, and most of the men do consider the education of women to be important. Unfortunately, this liberation is not geared to the improvement in the quality of life, but towards women trying to fit into a modern lifestyle and towards proving themselves superior over men. Islam does not encourage competition between men and women, but it wants an atmosphere of mutual co-operation so that a just society can result. The sphere of women is more limited than that of men, but no less important. A woman can play an important role in the society besides attending to her domestic responsibilities.

Nowhere can we find a better example of this perfect blend than in the life of Hazrat Ayesha (RA). No one can lift a finger of criticism against any aspect of her life. She got married off at a very early age, and shouldered the responsibilities of a household. Admittedly, she was not an expert at domestic

chores, but she tried her best to fulfill the requirements and expectations of her husband. Besides complete obedience and devotion to her partner, she wove a bond of such love and affection around him that her family life was enviable.

In addition to performing her religious obligations, she was very attentive to her superogatory acts of worship; this state continued after the Prophet's (SAW) death. Whether it be night worship or morning prayers; the taraweeh prayers of Ramadan or the extra fasts; sitting in isolation (Aitekaf) towards the end of Ramadan or the extra Hajj, she was not absent on any occasion. She was so repentant before Allah that once she was fasting on the day of Arafat, the heat got to her and she was being sprinkled with water when her brother, Abdur Rahman Bin Abi Bakr suggested that she break her fast. She was surprised and replied, "Why? After I heard from the Prophet (SAW) that keeping a fast on the day of Arafat releases one from his/her sins from a year of sins – can I break my fast?"

By nature, she was a brave and courageous lady. When she used to hear of the amazing rewards of those that performed Jihad, she used to feel envious. When she requested for permission for Jihad, the Prophet's (SAW) told her that a woman's Jihad was Hajj[35]. After hearing this statement, she was extremely conscientious about performing the annual pilgrimage, so much so that that rarely a year passed in which she did not proceed to Mecca with the pilgrims.

After going through Ayesha's record, one realizes that this was no ordinary woman leading an ordinary life. Her life went through tremendous ordeals right from childhood. Her family was subjected to ill treatment from the unbelievers of Mecca, as it was closest to the Prophet (SAW). When she got married and started her marital life in Medina, the warfare with the unbelievers commenced. She did not keep herself aloof from these happenings. Ayesha (RA) used to provide water and first

aid to those injured in the battle. The hypocrites' schemes were also a constant source of tension. Incidentally she became the victim of one of these schemes, only to be proved innocent by the revelations from the heavens above. She might be young in age, but she was never irresponsible. She underwent the trial just as a mature woman would, with full understanding of the implications and sensitivity of the issue. Her tears would not stop and she had sleepless nights, but she had kept her tongue in check. The only words she uttered in her defense were, " I will acquire the best of patience."

Emotionally speaking, a woman can bear serious strains in the marital relationships, but it is very difficult to share one's husband with another woman, let alone a number of women. Although she was the beloved of the Prophet's (SAW), yet she had to bear with patience his just and fair nature. He used to divide his time meticulously among his wives. What she must have gone through, we can only try to imagine. When she was attacked by pangs of jealousy, this never got the better of her and she never wished the other wives ill. She used to praise them with an open heart. She never resorted to petty quarrels. Once the Prophet (SAW) got annoyed with Zainab (RA) over some matter and she came to Ayesha to plead her case with the Prophet (SAW). Ayesha dressed herself with care and spoke with such skillfulness that the matter was resolved.

Nature dealt her a heavy blow when she got widowed at the tender age of eighteen. Besides the sorrow and anguish at being separated from her husband, there was neither wealth to carry her on nor any child to console her in her grief. In another couple of years, her loving father also passed away. Another woman in her predicament might have wallowed away in self-grief for the rest of her life, but not this courageous lady. Hats off to her for her patience and gratefulness to Allah throughout this tough ordeal.

If the story of Ayesha had ended here, it was sufficient to prove her as a woman of strength and wisdom inordinate. But instead of losing control of her life, she determined to dedicate her life to the cause of Islam. The verses of the Quran that ordered the wives of the Prophet (SAW) to stay in their houses could have been used by her to lead a sedentary life. She could have just busied herself in her personal acts of worship. Remaining within the limits that Allah had prescribed for her, she started a program of Islamic tarbeeah right from her doorstep. During the caliphate of Abu Bakr (RA), she had achieved eminence as a scholar in her own right. She did justice to her assumed responsibility of spreading deen. Her knowledge was not of the superficial kind. Tirmizi reports that the Companions did not face any issue but Ayesha (RA) had a solution for it.

Ayesha (RA) was very confident by nature. She never hesitated to speak the truth, be it against herself. The amazing thing is that she did not receive her education at any institute or school, but imbibed it day in and day out from the very fountainhead of prophet hood. She was also skillful in poetry, history and Tib medicine.

It can occur to the reader that Ayesha (RA) achieved so much because she was childless and did not have the responsibilities of a mother. It is true that she had no offspring, but Allah had conferred upon her the title of Mother of the Believers and she did full justice to this role. She felt for the Ummah very deeply and that is why she had made a decision to take vengeance for Usman's murder in order to bring peace to the Ummah. Though later she was extremely sorry at her action, yet in this whole incident, no one doubted her sincerity towards the Muslim nation. This was her sole political endeavour. When asked for her opinion on a political matter, she used to state her opinion and then stay aloof from the situation.

She had dedicated herself to social objectives. She used to bring

up orphans and educate them; she used to arrange their marriages too. She used to spend generously on the poor. No needy person was turned away empty-handed from her door. Ayesha (RA) used to give first preference to other's needs over her own. She kept just one outfit for herself, which she used to wash and wear again and again.

After the initial period of hardship that the early immigrants had to face, there began a series of conquests, which led to large amounts of booty being poured into the Muslim treasury. The Righteous Caliphs appointed a monthly amount for the wives of the Prophet (SAW) and also gave them a share of the booty. Another woman in the place of Ayesha (RA) might have fulfilled her material desires with this income. But the influence of the Prophet (SAW) had completely wiped out any desire for worldly belongings. Huge sums amounting to as much as a hundred thousand dirhams at a time were received by her, which were distributed among the needy the same day before sunset. Once her maid reminded her that she should have saved something for evening meal as she was fasting. Ayesha replied, "You should have prompted me earlier."

Such was the state of her generosity. One day her beloved nephew commented on the charitable nature of his aunt and said that something should be done to control her hand in giving alms. Ayesha (RA) got very upset at this remark and swore that she would never speak to him again. After much persuasion she relented and started speaking to him again. As expiation for breaking an oath, she freed many slaves.

Ayesha (RA) had a forgiving nature and used to admit her faults easily. She was popular among women because of her refined character, good manners and kind nature. She was an independent-minded lady but not an egotist. Her scholarly achievements and intellectual mind put her at par with the best of male scholars; in fact she even surpassed most of them. It

would have been no surprise if she had looked down upon other women for achieving so little educational prowess, but Ayesha was never embarrassed to be a woman, and she always stood up for the rights of women.

In the life of the Prophet (SAW), women used to ask her to approach him for the solution of their problems. Some issues were very private female matters, and it seemed awkward to talk to the Prophet (SAW) about these matters. In these cases, Ayesha (RA) was a tremendous help to them. Even after the Prophet's (SAW) death, she used to always protect women from being abused or looked down upon. Once she heard that a few Companions had been quoted as saying that prayers were invalidated if a woman, dog or a donkey passed in front of the one who prays. She was furious and said, "So a woman is a mere animal! How could you place us in the same category as donkeys and dogs? The Prophet (SAW) used to say his prayers with me lying in front of him; when he wanted to prostrate, I used to gather my feet together."

In the words of Syed Suleman Nadvi: "The biggest favour of Ayesha upon mankind is that she taught the world how a Muslim woman could, within the limits of the veil, play an active role in intellectual, religious, social, and political life. Islam has granted women a high status and has elevated them from their previously downtrodden position. The life story of Ayesha (RA) is a practical implementation of the kind of life that a woman should lead within an Islamic framework."

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Foreword

All Praise is for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

This booklet is second in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. It tells us about these unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam.

This booklet is about an extraordinary Muslim hero, and it has been a pleasurable experience to write about Khalid Bin Waleed (RA). We have a lot to learn from his example. He was one of the greatest military commanders in human history. In a short span of time, he was able to conquer a vast area and bring it under the control of Islam. Unlike others, he was very humble and attributed all his victories to the succour of Allah. His numerous conquests did not make him arrogant and when Caliph Umar (RA) dismissed him from service, he displayed perfect obedience. May Allah grant him a place in the highest levels of Jannah, and May Allah give us the ability to learn from his example and dedicate ourselves to the cause of Islam.

Inspite of fighting more than a hundred battles, and inspite of being wounded many times, Khalid (RA) died on his bed from natural causes. If anyone fears death on the battlefield, they should take a look at the life of this great hero. Death will overcome us wherever we are when the time comes.

May Allah reward Farheen Motiwala, Sana Dossal and Sohaib Umar for editing this piece of work, Nadeem Siddiqui for the design work, and Asif Misbah, my husband for his constant encouragement and support.

Eeman Asif Misbah

Khalid Bin Waleed (RA)

The Most Victorious General in Islamic History

The Only Undefeated Muslim Commander

Introduction

His name was Khalid, his Kuniat Abu Suleman, and his title Saif Ullah (The Sword of Allah).

His father was Waleed Bin Mugheera and he was related to the Prophet (SAW) in the seventh generation. His maternal aunt Maimoona (RA) was one of the wives of the Prophet (SAW). Thus the Prophet (SAW) was also his uncle. He belonged to the famous Banu Makhzoom tribe of the Quraish. This tribe was well known for its skill in warfare, literary pursuits and wise counsel.

Birth

There are different opinions regarding the period of Khalid's birth. It is difficult to determine which is the most accurate. It seems after considering different viewpoints that he was probably born around 593 AD and that would place his age at 24 years at the time of the advent of Islam.

Background and Childhood

Khalid's father Waleed Bin Mugheera was a powerful and rich chief of Makkah. It is said that his orchards extended from Makkah to Taif. Besides being a trader, he had an iron-mongering business as well. One can imagine the extent of his wealth by the fact that he used to get the cover of the Khana-e-

Kaaba changed using his own resources every alternate year. The next year, the rest of the Quraish tribe combined their resources to perform the same service. Waleed had six sons and two daughters. He was proud to have so many sons because it was considered honourable to have male offspring in the Arab culture. His sons had remarkable qualities of courage and valour. Hence he was also called Al-Wahid (the unique).

As was the norm in the Arab society, Khalid spent his initial years in the open desert environment. In his formative years, he grew up with the awareness that he was the son of a famous chief of the Banu Makhzoom tribe. There was no dearth of luxuries in the house, but Waleed inculcated in his sons the qualities of bravery, skill in warfare, and generosity. At a young age, Khalid took an active interest in horse-riding, spear-throwing, sword fighting and military strategy. He was endowed with a fearless, energetic and agile nature. He was tall and broad-shouldered, and had a well-built body. All these assets contributed in making him a popular man in Makkah and he was counted among the outstanding men in the city. We can determine how strong he was by the fact that once while wrestling with him, Umar's bone got fractured and it healed after a long time, although Umar himself was a strong fellow.

The Advent of Islam and the Stance of Khalid's Family

The public proclamation of Islam shook the very foundations of the Makkan society. In almost every household there was someone who responded to the call of truth. The chieftains of Quraish initially made fun of The Message, but their opposition became stronger and more severe as the movement gained strength. Among the prominent chiefs to oppose the message of Muhammad (SAW) were Waleed Bin Mugheera, Abu Jahl, Abu Sufyan and Abu Lahab. The declaration of Mohammad's (SAW) prophethood dealt a terrible blow to the prestige of Waleed. To him, the criteria for assuming leadership were

lineage, tribe, male offspring and wealth. He used to say that it was not possible to offer leadership to Mohammad (SAW) while he, the biggest chief of Quraish, received no acclaim. He considered another great chief to be Abu Masood to whom the Makkan leadership could be passed over. A Quranic revelation came as an answer to his attitude. “And they said: Why was this Quran not revealed to a man of great importance in the two famous tribes? (of Makkah and Taif)” (43-31).

Waleed, along with some leaders of the Quraish, approached Abu Talib and asked him to order his nephew to abandon his mission. Another delegation approached him and suggested to him that he hand over Mohammad (SAW) to them and in exchange Abu Talib should accept Waleed’s son Ammara, who was a strong, courageous and handsome man. Abu Talib was very displeased at this proposition and retorted that they wanted his son for murder, while they wished Abu Talib to rear and nurture theirs. He swore by Allah that he would never allow this to happen.

When the leaders of the Quraish felt that all their wealth, power and combined strength were not making a difference to the new movement, they resorted to the torture of poor Muslims. The magnetic force of truth and the staunch belief of the Muslims in the face of extreme persecution did nothing to melt the stonehearted disbelievers. Rather, it only increased them in arrogance and stubborn pride.

Waleed continued his unwavering assault on the Muslims. So much so that the following Ayah of the Quran are believed to be referring to him:

“Leave me and him, the one I produced alone and I gave him abundant wealth and sons who stayed near him, and I gave him every kind of comfort. But still he wishes for more. Never! He is a disbeliever of our verses. I will soon place him on a mount in Hell. Verily, he thought and plotted. So let him be cursed;

how he plotted! And once more let him be cursed; how he plotted! Then he thought. Then he frowned and made a face. Then he turned back and became arrogant. Then he said, 'this is nothing but magic which has been passed on from olden times. This is the word of a human being.' Soon I will cast him into Hell-fire. (74:11-74:17)"

This was the hostile environment that Khalid was living in, day in and day out. The abundance of wealth and involvement in worldly pursuits did not allow him to ponder over the basic questions of human existence and purpose. Under the influence of his father, Khalid and the rest of his family worked to destroy the newborn Islam. He also undertook trips to Basra and Syria for the purpose of barter and trade. Three months after the Prophet's (SAW) migration to Medina, Khalid's father died at the age of 95 years.

In the Battle of Badar, which was fought by the disbelievers against the Muslims, Khalid was not involved because he was away on a business trip. The Muslims won a landslide victory and Khalid's brother Waleed was captured as a prisoner of war. Besides this, seventeen of Khalid's cousins and nephews were killed in the battle. Khalid along with his brother Hisham decided to get Waleed released from bondage. He paid the ransom of 400 Dirhams for his release and all three brothers left for Makkah. In the night, they camped at a place called Zil Haleefa. But, by the grace of Allah, the light of Islam had penetrated into Waleed's heart and he left his tent in the cover of the night for Medina. Once there, he accepted Islam.

Makkah was thirsting for the blood of the Muslims after their respected leaders and loved ones had been killed at Badar. The city was echoing with the cries of revenge and their chiefs got busy earnestly preparing for another war. A year later, the two armies faced each other again at Uhud. 700 Muslims had come to battle against 3,000 disbelievers. The Makkan Army was

flanked on the right by Khalid and on the left by Ikramah (the son of Abu Jahl). Each had a hundred horsemen. Amr Bin Aas was in charge of the whole operation (all three accepted Islam later on).

The battle began and after some time, the Makkan army started to flounder. Their soldiers ran away from the battlefield and the Muslims were confident of their victory. The 50 Muslim archers who had been stationed at Aineen on a small mount left their positions and ran to collect the booty, against the orders of their commander, Abdullah Bin Jubair (RA). They had been specifically instructed by the Prophet (SAW) to guard their positions come what may, but the soldiers were convinced that the battle was won and they were afraid to be left out in the spoils of war. Khalid and Ikramah had not yet retreated from their positions. When they saw their warriors run helter skelter from the battlefield, they did not lose hope; instead they continued to watch the situation cool-headedly from a distance.

Soon, they noticed the weakness of the Muslims at the mount of Aineen, which hardly had any archers left. There were only nine archers left on the mount with the commander Abdullah Bin Jubair (RA). Khalid took advantage of the situation and attacked the archers and got control of this mount. The few Muslim archers who had remained steadfast in guarding the mount fought courageously and put on a very brave front. Some of them were martyred, and the rest were thrown down the mount, seriously injured.

Khalid's attack from the rear created a furor in the Muslim army. Abu Sufyan, who had been watching the situation from a distance, collected his dispersed soldiers and attacked from the front as well. The Muslim army was now surrounded from both sides. The Prophet's (SAW) life was also in grave danger. One group of Companions had already laid down their lives to protect him. Only a few Companions were left with him and

they had formed a protective circle around him. They slowly maneuvered him into a narrow valley away from the fighting.

In the battle of Uhud, the pagans of Makkah did not win a decisive victory over the Muslims. But it was clear to both sides that Khalid was a formidable commander who had great military insight and lots of courage. Spotting the enemy's weak point, gathering his scrambled force and attacking the Muslims from the back can be attributed to his military genius. This was only the beginning of his military career and the Muslims realized that he was a fearsome enemy.

Two years after Uhud, the Battle of the Trench (Khandaq) took place. It ended without any fight and Allah (SWT) protected the Muslims from any casualties. In the 6th year of migration, the Prophet (SAW) left Medina for Makkah intending to perform Umrah. Khalid was dispatched by the Makkans at the head of 200 horsemen to gauge the true intention of the Muslim camp. He and his men tried their best to provoke the Muslims to fight but the calmness and peaceful attitude of the Muslims drove them back. This resulted in an agreement between the two parties which is called The Treaty of Hudaybiah.

Khalid's Call to Islam

After the battle of Uhud, Khalid was often involved in deep thought. For some time now, he had been sensing that Allah was indeed protecting the Muslims. Despite the Makkan army's greater numbers, more weapons and war animals, no one could actually harm the Muslim cause. Every passing day brought them new victories and new conversions. The Muslims were steadily gaining in strength and power. Khalid began to ponder over the meanings of the Quranic revelations, its wisdom and the truth of its teachings. In the various battles of Uhud and Khandaq and the incident of Hudaybiah, as well as the interactions with the Prophet (SAW) and his Companions, their sincerity to Allah, their selflessness and their wonderful attitude

shone through. Gradually, Khalid was getting convinced that Allah was indeed with the believers.

In his own words, “When the Prophet (SAW) camped at Hudaybiah, I saw him offer his prayers. I tried my level best to harm him and his Companions but my efforts bore no fruit. At that moment, it dawned on me that Allah was their Helper and Protector and however much we tried, we could not overcome them.”

These thoughts stayed with Khalid for a while and by each passing day he was even more convinced that Islam is the true religion of Allah. He mentioned this realization to Ikramah who was stunned to see the transformation in Khalid’s stance. He tried his best to convince him out of this way of thinking, but the matter had progressed to a deeper level, and the light of Imaan (faith) had illuminated Khalid’s heart. Abu Sufyan exploded with anger when he found out about Khalid’s change of heart and he warned Khalid of dire consequences if he did not change his line of thinking. At this occasion, Ikramah, who was Khalid’s nephew and close friend, came to his defense and proclaimed that Khalid had the right to choose whatever faith he liked.

The Prophet (SAW) had come to know of the state of Khalid’s mind because Allah had disclosed to him the good news by way of revelation. He called Khalid’s brother Waleed (who had converted to Islam after the Battle of Badar) and told him of Khalid’s change of heart. He said to him, “The truth of Islam has dawned on Khalid, so why doesn’t he accept Islam?”

Waleed (RA) sent his brother a letter and invited him to accept Islam, mentioning the inquiry of the Prophet (SAW). When Khalid read his brother’s letter, he was filled with the urge to go to Medina immediately and embrace Islam. He set out for Medina promptly and met Usman Bin Talha and Amr Bin Al-Aas on the way. They were also going to Medina for the same

purpose. The Prophet (SAW) had already informed the Muslims in Medina about their arrival and said that Makkah had thrown out its heart and soul to them. After reaching Medina, Khalid donned a fine robe and appeared before the Prophet (SAW) before his other companions. He recited the Kalimah and became a Muslim. He expressed his consternation to the Prophet (SAW) on account of the great excesses he had committed against the Muslims in the past. He was consoled with the good news that when a person converts, his past sins are wiped out. Then the Prophet (SAW) prayed for his success. Khalid accepted Islam in the beginning of 8th Hijri.

The Sword of Allah in the Battlefield

The first battle Khalid (RA) participated in after he became a Muslim was at a place called Mautah. The reason for the battle was that the ruler of Basra had mercilessly killed the envoy of the Prophet (SAW). When the Prophet (SAW) received this disturbing news, he dispatched an army of 3,000 men under the command of Zaid Bin Harisa (RA). He further instructed that if Zaid died, then Jafar Bin Abi Talib (RA), and if Jafar was slain then Abdullah Bin Rawaha (RA) should be made the commander of the army. When the Muslim army advanced forward and reached a place called Ma'an, they heard that the Caesar of Rome (in response to an appeal for help from Basra) had sent an army of 100,000 to support the ruler of Basra. This was a terrifying piece of information for the Muslims. They were not equipped to fight such a huge army. There were two options open to them – either inform the Prophet (SAW) and wait for further orders, or to jump into the battle in the name of Allah. Abdullah Bin Rawaha gave such an emotional speech to the soldiers at this occasion that they were fired with enthusiasm and the decision to fight was undertaken with fervour.

Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) was an ordinary soldier in this army.

The battle was about to begin and both armies faced each other at Mautah. It was not long before the commander of the Muslim army, Zaid Bin Harisa (RA) was martyred. After him Jafar (RA), the next in line, fought very bravely and was badly wounded. When his right arm was cut off, he lifted the banner with his left hand, and when the left one was also severed from his body, he managed to put up the flag with the support of his hanging arms and legs, until he too was martyred. Now Abdullah Bin Rawaha (RA) stepped up to hold the flag. But he too was slain in the battle. An atmosphere of dejection and uncertainty prevailed in the Muslim ranks. At that moment, Thabit Bin Arqam (RA) leapt forward and handed the banner to Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) and nominated him as the commander. All the Muslims unanimously agreed to this proposal. This led to a renewal in the morale of the Muslim forces. Khalid himself claimed to have broken nine swords while fighting and had only a small Yemeni dagger left. The fighting was still going strong when it started to become dark. Both armies retreated to their camps for the night.

Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) pondered over what course of action to take. He had three alternatives before him. The first was to turn back, the second was to carry on with the fight till the end with such heavy odds against them, and the last was to adopt a strategy that would not result in the defeat of the Muslims and would allow them to back out gracefully without any additional loss of lives.

The next day Khalid (RA) rearranged the ranks of the Muslim army in such a manner that it appeared to the enemy that the Muslims had been sent reinforcements overnight. They were alarmed and panicked, backing off as they fought. This was the opportunity that Khalid was waiting for. Very skillfully, he maneuvered the army out of the battle and headed them towards Medina with minimum loss of lives.

The Prophet (SAW) had been apprised of the situation through a revelation from Allah (SWT), hence he informed the Companions before any actual news had reached from Khalid, “In the battle the flag was upheld by Zaid and he was killed, then Jafar took it and he was martyred too, and then Ibn Rawaha took the banner, but he too was killed (his eyes were shedding tears as he said this). Finally a sword among the swords of Allah took the flag and Allah granted victory to it.” After this day, Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) was called Saifullah (The Sword of Allah). According to one tradition the Prophet (SAW) prayed that Allah should always grant victory to Khalid as he was the Sword of Allah.

After the conquest of Makkah, the Muslims entered the Holy City peacefully without any bloodshed. It was also the desire of the Prophet (SAW) that Makkah be conquered without any act of violence. He had arranged the army into four divisions, one of which was under Khalid’s command. The four divisions marched towards Makkah through four different routes so that the Makkans would have no chance of assembling an army against them. Because all exits to Makkah had been covered, there was no route left for the enemy lines to escape. The Prophet (SAW) ordered that if there was no instigation from the Makkan side, there was no need for any bloodshed.

Three of the divisions reached Makkah without any skirmish but Khalid’s army was confronted with tough old veterans of Makkah who did not want to surrender their city without a challenge. Their leaders were Ikramah Bin Abi Jahl and Safwan. As mentioned earlier Ikramah happened to be a close friend of Khalid (RA) and Safwan was his brother-in-law. But the love of Islam was greater in Khalid’s heart than friendship or blood ties. The fight was instigated by the Quraish army and Khalid counter-attacked. After a brief but intense skirmish, he repelled the Quraish army. 12 soldiers of the Quraish were killed and two Muslims were martyred. Ikramah and Safwan

deserted the battlefield in order to save their lives.

When the Prophet (SAW) heard of this brief instance of aggression and further found out about the killing of the Makkan soldiers, he was unhappy and asked Khalid for an explanation. He was consoled when informed that the initiative to fight had been undertaken by the enemy lines.

After the peaceful conquest of Makkah and after breaking the idols in the Kaabah, the Prophet (SAW) sent Khalid (RA) to break the famous Quraish idol of Uzzah. The fierce tribes of Kananah and Mazar undertook the responsibility for the protection of these deities. Khalid (RA) left with 30 horsemen and without any resistance, succeeded in his mission.

After the capture of Makkah, the Prophet (SAW) sent small bands of Muslim soldiers to preach Islam in different areas and to maintain harmony and peace in these regions. A small army was sent under the leadership of Khalid (RA) to Bani Jazimah. In this procession, there were 300 Muhajirs, Ansars and members of Banu Sulaym. The people of Banu Jazimah had embraced Islam. But when they saw Khalid (RA) approaching with an army, they gathered their forces to put up a resistance. (They thought Khalid had come to avenge the murder of his uncle who had been killed by them earlier). Khalid (RA) was stunned to see the armed men of Banu Jazimah and asked why they had gathered an army when he was the messenger of the Prophet (SAW) and they had accepted Islam. Instead of clarifying their stance, the members of Banu Jazimah started saying “Sabana, Sabana’. This word was used sarcastically by the Quraish of Makkah to denote the ones who had become Muslims. Khalid (RA) misunderstood their suspicious gesture and ordered the Muslim soldiers to capture and kill the hostile tribe. The Muhajirs and Ansars were not ready to implement this command, but the members of Banu Sulaym eagerly seized their old enemies and put them to death.

When this news traveled to the Prophet (SAW), he was extremely upset. He prayed for forgiveness from Allah and exempted himself from this matter. Then he sent Ali (RA) with a heavy sum to the tribe of Banu Jazimah so that he could pay the blood money and soothe the troubled minds of these people. The Prophet (SAW) then called Khalid (RA) for an explanation. Khalid (RA) explained the situation to the Prophet (SAW) and told him how he had thought that the tribe was deceiving the Muslims. Abdur Rahman Bin Auf (RA) was standing nearby listening to this discussion and he reprimanded Khalid severely by saying that he had committed an act of Jahiliyya (ignorance) in the Islamic order. Khalid retaliated with a sharp retort. The Prophet (SAW) silenced Khalid with these words, "Khalid, leave my Companions alone! If you had a mountain of gold and you spent it in the way of Allah, even then you could not exalt yourself to the same status as them." Khalid (RA) took these words to heart and acted according to these instructions of the Prophet (SAW) till the end of his life. His humble attitude before the eminent Companions was manifested many times in the future events that took place, and will be discussed later.

In the battle of Hunain, the Muslims were a sizable force and because of their large numbers they were over-confident of their victory. Khalid (RA) was at the command of 700 horsemen. The commander-in-chief of the enemy lines was Malik Bin Auf, who conceived a brilliant strategy against the Muslim forces. First he placed his army at a point called Autas. When the Muslims were informed of this move, he hid the forces in the narrow valley of Hunain. He placed the archers in the front trenches and the armed back-ups in the rear ones. The Muslims were under the false impression that the enemy was in Autas. The desire to take the unbelievers by surprise propelled Khalid forward in great haste; he was the first to fall into the trap and came under the attack of the enemy troops hidden in the Hunain valley. Scores of arrows greeted him and his men. This surprise move caused a panic in the Muslim ranks. Khalid (RA) called

out to his men again and again to fight tooth and nail against the opponents. But his voice could not be heard amid the confusion and chaos. Khalid himself got injured badly and fell off his horse. He lay on the ground without any movement for quite a while.

The Prophet (SAW) called out to the fleeing Muslim fighters, but the pandemonium and chaos drowned his voice too and only nine Companions were left with him. The Prophet (SAW) ordered Abbas (RA) to gather the scattered forces. Abbas (RA) had a powerful booming voice and when he summoned the men they darted back, returning to the battlefield, one by one. The enemies were closing in on the Prophet (SAW) but the army under Malik Bin Auf could not put up a formidable show despite the excellent strategy of their commander. They could not match the valour of the few Muslims fighting in the one-to-one combat that took place. When the fleeing Muslim forces returned, a fierce battle started. The Prophet recited a few verses saying that he was a Prophet, not a liar, and that he was the son of Abdul Muttalib. Saying this, he stepped down from his camel and threw a handful of mud at the adversaries of Islam. The enemy soldiers lost heart and retreated from the battlefield. Khalid (RA) was one of those who had been badly wounded at the onset of the battle. The Prophet (SAW) came to him and prayed over his wounds, which helped Khalid recover miraculously.

This was the first time Khalid had come under a surprise enemy attack. He had learnt his lesson from this experience and never again in his lifetime did he become the victim of such an ambush of the enemy.

In 9 Hijri, the Muslims received the fearsome news that Hercule was preparing to attack them with a huge army. The Prophet (SAW) at the head of 30,000 soldiers came to camp at Tabuk. Khalid Bin Waleed commanded the front of the army. But soon

they received the news that the Roman force had retreated. Khalid (RA) successfully handled a number of small expeditions in the mean while and on the way back at the order of the Prophet (SAW).

In the 10th year of Hijrah, the Prophet (SAW) sent a force to Najran against Banu Harisa under the leadership of Khalid. He was specially instructed to first spread the teachings of Islam among these people and invite them to embrace the faith. If they accepted Islam, then no arms were to be taken up against them. Khalid (RA) reached Najran at the head of 400 horsemen. He started preaching Islam as per instructions. The people of this city accepted Islam without any protest and there was no bloodshed. This was the last expedition that Khalid undertook during the lifetime of the Prophet (SAW).

Khalid Fights the Apostates

After the death of the Prophet (SAW), the Arabian peninsula was in a state of turmoil and there arose a number of digressers who claimed to be Prophets. Besides Makkah, Medina and a portion of Taif, most tribes and regions of Arabia rebelled against the authority of the Muslim caliphate and broke their pledges of loyalty with Medina. False prophets sprung up and they mustered support of the tribes who had accepted Islam merely for political gain. Now after the death of the Prophet (SAW) they threw off their mantle of loyalty to Islam and started acting in a rebellious fashion. The most prominent among these false messengers were Talaiha Bin Khaweeld, Musailma Bin Habeeb and a prophetess named Sajjah Bint Haris.

Abu Bakar (RA) had a difficult task in front of him when he assumed the caliphate of the Muslim Ummah. He had to fight on many fronts simultaneously. In Bazakha against Talaha, in Batah against Malik Bin Nuwaira, in Yamama against Musailma Kazzab. Besides these, on the Arab borders, there

were rebellions occurring in Bahrain, Oman, Muhra, Hazar e maut and Yemen. Hence Makkah and Medina could be described as little oases of true faith in a desert of infidelity. In these hair-raising circumstances, Abu Bakr demonstrated immense bravery and courage.

Ayesha (RA) relates, "After the death of the Prophet (SAW), such tremendous difficulties greeted my father that had they fallen on strong mountains, they would have crumbled to pieces." In terms of number of soldiers, the infidels had a clear advantage over the Muslims. Abu Bakr (RA) carefully planned his strategy and organized the Muslim forces into 11 divisions. He chose Khalid's division to deliver the heaviest blow to the apostates. He had to attack the most dangerous line of rebels. The other army divisions were dependent on the outcome of this attack.

The first attack on the rebellious forces gathered outside Medina was launched by Abu Bakr (RA) himself. Then Khalid (RA) advanced towards Bazakha to fight against the false prophet Talaiha. On the way, he persuaded several tribes to convert to Islam. He defeated Talaiha easily and proceeded to Salma Bint Malik who was foremost in organizing an uprising against the Muslim state. At a place called Zafar, she was killed and then Khalid (RA) proceeded to lead an attack against the false prophetess Sajjah who had initially joined hands with Malik Bin Nuwaira. However, in the mean while when she got married with Musailma Kazzab, her group was dispersed. Malik did not offer much resistance and was killed in the encounter. Now Khalid (RA) advanced forward towards his last major opponent Musailma Kazzab who had gathered for the battle at Yamama along with an army of 40,000 men.

This was the decisive battle which was to make the difference between victory and defeat for the whole Muslim Ummah. Present in Khalid's army were eminent Companions who were

from the Muhajirin and the Ansar as well as many Huffaz-e-Quran. The enemy forces outnumbered the Muslim forces three to one. Under the flag of Banu Hanifa they were burning with prejudice and anger. It would have been a political death for them to accept the supremacy of Hijaz. Whether they accepted Musailma as a prophet or not, they wanted their own person as the head of government rather than the figurehead in Hijaz.

The battle started out as a formidable one. The Muslims had never experienced such a fearsome encounter before and in the beginning it looked as if they would be defeated. The soldiers of Musailma's army reached the tent of Khalid Bin Waleed (RA). The Muslim leaders became restless when they saw this state of affairs and they spurred on the soldiers to fight harder. Thabit Bin Qais exclaimed, "O Allah! Please exempt me from the cowardice shown by these Muslims." Abu Huzaifah shouted, "O Believers in the Quran! Adorn the Quran through your deeds."

Now Khalid (RA) took a grave look at the situation. He attacked the enemy forces with such fury that they were forced to recede. At the same time, he commanded each division to fight separately instead of being part of one big force. The wisdom behind this was that some of the Muslims during the battle had been arguing as to which tribe was the most courageous. Khalid (RA) tried to channelise this vain talk and gave them a chance to prove their mettle. Very soon, the Muslims realized the error of their thinking and focused on the fight but each of the enemy soldiers was putting up a great fight.

Khalid (RA) realized that so long as the main flank of the opponent army under Musailma was not defeated, the apostate army would not scatter. So he launched an intense onslaught against them. Musailma's main chief Rijaal was killed and his division became confused and dispersed. When Musailma ran for his life, his followers asked him in shock, "Where is the

victory that you promised us?" He answered, "Save your life for your tribe's sake!" Prior to this, he was sitting inside the camp pretending to await a revelation from the Lord. His forces dispersed after he fled, and they all took refuge in a big garden on which was built the fortress of Musailma. The garden was called 'Hadiqatur Rahman' (The Garden of Rahman). This was named after Musailma who called himself the Rahman of Yamama (Rahman means most gracious).

The Islamic forces laid siege to this fortress. There seemed to be no way of going inside. Amid this helpless situation, Baraa Bin Maalik suggested that he should be thrown over the wall. This seemed like suicide and the Muslims did not agree to this proposal. But on Baraa's insistence, they threw him over the wall of the fortress. An extra ordinary sword fighter, Baraa single-handedly made way for himself with the help of his sword; to the extent that he succeeded in opening the door of the fortress. The Muslim army rushed inside and there ensued a bloody skirmish. Musailma was killed by Wahshi, a Muslim soldier who when a disbeliever, had killed Hamza (RA) in the Battle of Uhud. His army lost their zeal to fight and interest in the battle. Hence the long drawn battle came to an end.

The enemy left 20,000 dead in the battlefield. The Muslims also suffered a sizable loss of manpower – the number of Muslims martyred was 1,200, out of which 300 were Huffaz-e-Quran. Among prominent Companions, Zaid Bin Khattab, Abu Huzaifah and Salim Maula Huzaifa lost their lives. This battle was so bloody that the garden where it ended in came to be called the Garden of Death.

Hence in this way, with the help of Allah (SWT), Khalid (RA) was able to rid the Islamic empire of the nuisance of apostates and false prophets. In this entire period, he had established himself to be the undisputed commander of the Islamic forces. The whole of Arabia talked about his superior leadership

qualities and expertise in war strategies. Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) had become a Muslim hero.

The Conquest of Iraq

The long fight against the apostates had come to an end. Khalid (RA) received an order from Abu Bakr (RA) to proceed towards Iraq. In those days, Iraq was not an independent country, but was a part of the Iranian empire which was a superpower. It was known for its abundant resources. Iran was undergoing political turmoil and its ruling family was fighting among themselves. Finding the opportunity attractive, the leader of the frontier tribe of Banu Bakr, Musanna Bin Harisa asked Abu Bakr for permission to wage Jihad against Iraq. He was granted the permission to attack by the Caliph. Khalid was sent at the head of a large force (18,000 soldiers) to Iraq and was made the Commander in Chief of the entire operation.

Khalid (RA) first clashed with the Persian ruler of the frontier area Hermuz at a place called Kazma. As soon as the battle began Khalid killed Hermuz in a one to one duel. Hermuz happened to be the strongest chief of the Iranian empire. In this battle Khalid was also taken unawares in a surprise attack by the enemy. But Qaaqaa (RA) controlled the situation well in time. The Persian army left the battlefield inspite of having a massive amount of weaponry.

When the King of Persia was informed about the advance of Khalid's army, he sent a force under the command of Qarun Bin Qaryanus to help Hermuz. But before the support army reached, Khalid (RA) had already gained a tremendous victory over them. Qarun was also killed by the Muslim forces near River Maaqal along with his two main commanders. His army was demoralized when they heard this news and they were badly defeated.

After hearing of the dismaying result of the encounter the King

of Persia Ardeshar was highly perturbed. He sent two heavily armed battalions to combat Khalid (RA) under the leadership of Andazghar and Behman Jadwia. Before the two armies could meet to combine their forces and fight the Muslims, Khalid (RA) intercepted Andazghar at Walja and gave him a crushing defeat.

At a place called Alees, the famous general Behman Jadwia now faced Khalid (RA) with a huge force. After a fierce encounter, Behman fled from the battlefield leaving behind 90,000 casualties. This was a very tough battle and in the words of Khalid (RA) himself, "At the junction of Mautah I broke nine swords. But I never encountered a fiercer enemy than the Persians and among the Persians, I never faced a stronger force than that of Alees."

The next destination of the Islamic forces was Heera, which they managed to conquer without any resistance. After this, with high morale and raising the Islamic banner, the cities of Anbar, Ain ul Tamar, Domat al Jandal and Masseeqh were overtaken and the last stop now was Faraz. Here after a short encounter Khalid (RA) was able to give a crushing defeat to the Persian army.

In less than one year, Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) had succeeded in conquering the whole of Iraq thus putting the Persian superpower to shame. His success can be attributed to his military prowess, his intelligence, his swift movements, and above all the support of Allah (SWT). Hence immediately after the fall of Faraz, Khalid (RA) proceeded for Hajj in order to thank Allah for His blessings.

The Conquest of Syria

Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) had just completed the Iraqi operation when he was summoned by the Caliph Abu Bakr (RA) to leave half of the armed forces in Iraq and to proceed with the other

half to Syria (Shaam). Here the Islamic forces had to face the Romans in battle. The ruler of Syria Hercule had assembled such a formidable army that the Muslims appealed to Abu Bakr (RA) for reinforcements. Khalid (RA) was once again appointed the Chief of the Operation and asked to march to Syria at once. He proceeded to Syria, conquering a number of towns and villages on the way, and then met up with the Muslim forces sent by the Caliph in Medina. At the point of Ajnadain the Muslims came face to face with the Roman army. Out of 90,000 Roman soldiers, 50,000 were killed. The Commander of their army and other important chiefs were also killed. On the Muslim front, Zarar Bin Azor (RA) exhibited such feats of heroism that he struck fear and terror in the hearts of the enemy.

After this accomplishment, Khalid (RA) marched on to Damascus and laid siege to the city. Hercule panicked and sent extra forces to combat the Muslim army which Zarar (RA) and some other Muslim soldiers were chosen to clash with. Unfortunately, this band of followers was taken prisoners by the Roman army. Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) left Abu Ubaidah (RA) in charge of Damascus and rushed to rescue the Muslim soldiers. After defeating the Romans, he succeeded in releasing them from the clutches of the enemy. After returning to Damascus, there were some other skirmishes but none was decisive.

Khalid (RA) was at one end of the city of Damascus and Abu Ubaidah (RA) was at the other end along with their respective forces. One day a young Greek man came up to Khalid and revealed that he had a plan to enter the fortified city if in return Khalid would help him in securing his beloved who was now his wife. The parents of his wife were not letting her come to him. Khalid (RA) agreed to his proposal. The young man disclosed that there would be a big festival the following night for the people of Damascus and they would be busy in celebrations. On this night, even the guards at the gate of the

fortress would be relaxed and enjoying the festivities. This would be a golden opportunity for Khalid and his band of Muslims to scale the fortress walls with the help of a rope-ladder and get to the entrance.

The next night Khalid (RA) along with three others scaled the wall at lightening speed and succeeded in opening the gate of the fortified city for the Muslim force to enter. Because this operation was carried out so swiftly, it could not be communicated to Abu Ubaidah (RA) at the other end of the city. When the Muslims succeeded in capturing the entire city, the Roman commander guessed that Abu Ubaidah (RA) would be in the dark about this latest development. Taking advantage of the situation, he cleverly got Abu Ubaidah to sign a pact of peace. When Khalid found out he was extremely upset because now the booty and spoils of the enemy would no longer fall into the hands of the Muslims, for which they had made such a great effort. Despite this, Khalid (RA) adhered to the terms of the pact and let the Romans go free.

Demotion and Dismissal from Service

In the month of Jamadi ul Akhir 13th Hijri the first caliph Abu Bakr (RA) died. Before his death he nominated Umar (RA) as his successor. In his first public address, Umar (RA) demoted Khalid (RA) and appointed Abu Ubaidah (RA) as the General of the Armed Forces. This was at the time when the siege in Damascus was coming to an end. Under such difficult circumstances any change in leadership would have damaged the morale of the armed forces especially since they were totally devoted to their commander Khalid Bin Waleed. The messenger who carried this command of the caliph was an astute person. He evaluated the situation at hand and kept silent about the issue. He delivered the letter to Abu Ubaidah quietly. Abu Ubaidah kept the contents of the letter hidden from Khalid till the city had fallen to the Muslims. After the conquest of

Damascus he called Khalid separately and apprised him of the decision of the new caliph. Khalid (RA) immediately accepted the decision and became an ordinary soldier under the command of Abu Ubaidah (RA).

Abu Ubaidah (RA) appointed Khalid (RA) as the commander of the Iraqi division. Before taking any military decision he used to always consult Khalid for his opinion. He had full confidence in the farsighted military vision that Khalid possessed; so much so that the important battle of Yarmouk was practically fought according to the strategy suggested by Khalid (RA).

Under the command of Abu Ubaidah (RA), Khalid managed to conquer many different places including Mar'ash wherefrom the Muslim army secured a lot of wealth. On return a famous poet called Ash'as composed a poem in praise of Khalid's achievements. Khalid rewarded him with 10,000 dirhams. When Caliph Umar heard of this, he was furious. He wrote a letter to Abu Ubaidah (RA) ordering him to present Khalid in public, tie his hands with his own turban, take off his headgear and ask him where he got the money to reward Ash'as the poet. If he answered that he had taken it from the Muslim treasury, then it was dishonesty and if he admitted to have given it from his own pocket, then that would be wasteful spending (Israaf). In both situations he was to be dismissed from service and his duties were to be given to someone else.

According to the orders of the Caliph, Bilal (RA) in the presence of Abu Ubaidah (RA) presented Khalid (RA) in public. Before the audience, Khalid admitted that he had used his own money to reward Ash'as. Bilal (RA) then untied his hands and replaced his cap. He told Khalid, "We listen to and obey the orders of our rulers."

Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) said goodbye to his brave armed forces and his cavalry and left for Medina. As soon as he reached Medina, Umar (RA) met him on the way. He took a

detailed account of Khalid's resources, and took away anything that he found in excess.

Khalid's Death

A few days after staying in Medina, Khalid (RA) left for Syria. He never returned to Arabia. After his dismissal from the army, his financial condition also deteriorated. Fate had more trials awaiting him, it seemed. In 18 Hijri, the deadly plague enveloped Syria and Palestine. In this epidemic several of Khalid's good friends and companions like Abu Ubaidah (RA), Sharjeel (RA), Yazeed (RA) and Zarar (RA) all died. According to a tradition, 40 of his sons also succumbed to this disease and died.

At the age of 58, in the year 20 Hijri, Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) contracted a terminal illness. The period of illness was long and he suffered a lot, and this ailment made his whole body weak. A few days before he passed away, a friend of his came to see him. Khalid revealed to him different parts of his body. His whole body was covered with scars left from wounds encountered in the numerous battles that he had fought. Then he stated, "I sought martyrdom in hundreds of battles, then why did I not die on the battlefield?" He was very regretful about this fact till the end. Perhaps Allah Himself did not want The Sword of Islam to be broken by the enemy.

In the end, only a faithful slave was by his side. At the time of death, his total possessions were a few weapons, one horse and a slave.

The news of Khalid's death hit Medina like a storm. The women of the tribe of Banu Makhzoom began lamenting and crying over the death of the great general whose contribution to the Muslim empire was unparalleled. Other women of Medina also joined them in their grief. Umar (RA) had strictly forbidden the loud crying of Muslims over any death. When he

heard the sobbing voices, he stepped out to stop the people. Then he heard sounds of grief coming from the house of Hafsa (RA), his own daughter who was expressing her sorrow at the death of the great Muslim general. He stopped and said, "Let the women of Banu Makhzoom cry over the death of Abu Suleman (Khalid's kuniyet), because they are not lying in what they are saying. Those who are grieving are crying over a great personality like Abu Suleman."

The Issue Between Umar (RA) and Khalid (RA)

The first caliph Abu Bakr (RA) fully utilized the superior military acumen of Khalid (RA). He always appreciated Khalid's efforts and bravery. He chose Khalid (RA) as the Commander of the entire Muslim army and sending him to fight the apostates was proof of the great confidence in his abilities. On one occasion after the conquest of Iraq a lot of wealth was poured into the Muslim treasury. Abu Bakr (RA) called the Muslims to the masjid and told them the good news in these words, "O Quraish! Your lion attacked another lion and overpowered him. Women can never again bear a son like Khalid." (Such a person would never be born again).

When the Muslims were confronted with the Roman army which was a huge one and heavily armed, Abu Bakr's gaze fell on Khalid. He said, "By Allah! I will destroy the Romans and the accomplices of Shaitan through Khalid!" Once when Umar (RA) insisted that Khalid (RA) be removed from his position, Abu Bakr (RA) replied, "I will not put this sword back in its sheath which Allah has unsheathed against the kuffar (unbelievers)!"

What was the issue between Caliph Umar (RA) and Khalid Bin Waleed (RA)? A lot has been written on this topic by commentators. It is obvious that there was no relationship of trust between the two as that which existed between Abu Bakr (RA) and Khalid (RA). Inspite of this, Umar (RA) always

admired the bravery, courage, determination and military acumen of Khalid. Likewise, Khalid knew in his heart that whatever harsh decisions were taken against him by the Caliph were not due to any rancour towards him but because of his own high standards of piety. Umar (RA) had a very high standard of moral excellence for himself and for all other Muslims, especially those who commanded a high position because they were role models for those under their command. Umar (RA) was not prepared to give any concessions to anyone, especially those in high positions, as regarded the limits set by Allah. This is endorsed by the fact that when Khalid (RA) died, he made Umar (RA) his heir and his belongings were left to the discretion of the Caliph.

Umar (RA) always spoke about Khalid (RA) in glowing terms during his lifetime and after his death. When Umar (RA) received the news of Khalid's success in the battle of Hazir, he stated, "Khalid has been granted leadership qualities in his blood. May Allah shower His mercy over Abu Bakr (RA); he was a better judge of character than I."

So what were the reasons behind the demotion and dismissal of Khalid? One of the reasons has already been mentioned that Umar (RA) was very strict and vigilant about religious limits while in a couple of incidents Khalid (RA) had mistakenly killed a few Muslims. Another reason is explained by Tibri's narrative that tells us that when Khalid was summoned to Medina on the orders of the Caliph for accountability, Umar told him as soon as he saw Khalid, "You have done what no other man could achieve, but these things are actually done by Allah and not human beings." (Umar was referring to his amazing and numerous conquests in so short a time period).

Then the Caliph sent a letter to all his commanders-in-chief and governors. It stated, "I have not dismissed Khalid due to any personal vengeance nor due to any dishonourable act performed

by him, but only due to the fact that people were too much under his sway, and they hero-worshipped him to the extent of falling into error. I feared that people would start relying on Khalid (instead of Allah). I want people to understand that only Allah has the power to do all things, and that there should be no fitnah (potential disorder) in the country".

When Umar (RA) was informed of Khalid's death, he became very sorrowful and said, "The Muslims have been dealt with such a blow for which there is no compensation. Khalid was an outstanding general, no one can take his place, he was a calamity for the enemy

Once a poet came and recited some verses in appreciation of Khalid (RA). Umar (RA) exclaimed, "You could not do justice to Khalid." This was the general whose admirers and his critics both praised him. Gibbon in his book 'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' describes Khalid (RA) as 'the most fierce and the most successful Arab warrior.'

Khalid's Remarkable Skill at Warfare

When one analyses the conquests of Khalid (RA), many a times one is struck with amazement. In a short period of 11 years, he fought as many as 41 major battles, in addition to numerous small ones. In none of these battles was he defeated. Behind this amazing success was the hand of Allah (SWT) but we do have to account for the remarkable war strategies adopted by Khalid (RA) and his undaunting nature. He deviated from the traditional methods of warfare and introduced new concepts and new ways of fighting. A few of his strategies are mentioned below.

Psychological Tactics

Khalid (RA) always tried to psyche out his opponents and confuse them before the start of the battle in order to damage

their morale. We see after the battle of Silasil in Yamama where Musailma Kazzab was killed, that Khalid received orders to proceed directly to Iraq. Traditionally the approach to Abla in Iraq was through a place called Kazma. To confuse Hermuz and his army Khalid (RA) deliberately led his forces through another route through Huzair. When Hermuz reached Kazma he received the baffling news that Khalid was coming from the direction of Huzair. When he reached Huzair with his heavy contingent, he was given the information that Khalid had now left for Kazma. Hermuz again directed the army towards Kazma. By the time the two armies came face to face, the soldiers of the Persian army were so exhausted and frustrated that they could not hold up for long against the Muslim warriors.

The Element of Surprise

Khalid (RA) used the element of surprise in warfare to his advantage against the enemy. This strategy is used in modern warfare as it was used in earlier times. We see in the battle of Walja that the Persian and the Muslim forces were fighting with equal valour. But due to the small number of soldiers, every Muslim was fighting against a number of the enemy soldiers. Gradually the Muslim army started to show signs of fatigue. It seemed as if the Persian forces would gain the upper hand against the Muslims. Suddenly a fresh contingent of 4,000 Muslim soldiers attacked the Persian army from the rear. Khalid had hidden this force in the mountains at the back during the night earlier. At his signal they rushed down and fell upon the enemy fiercely, much to their horror and surprise. The enemy was now surrounded from both sides and suffered an enormous defeat.

On another occasion Khalid (RA) and his battalion had just concluded the war of Ainul Tamar, when he received the report that the enemy was collecting at a point called Maseeqh.

Khalid wanted to take the enemy by surprise. He divided his battalion into three sections. He attacked the enemy forces unawares in the quiet of the night on three fronts. By the time the Persian army realized what was happening, the Muslims were already upon them and it was too late. Thousands of Persian soldiers were killed and the rest fled the battlefield.

Bold Innovative Tactics in the Face of War Dilemmas

The word impossible did not exist in Khalid's dictionary. He used to find a creative solution to each problem that appeared. An example can be found in the battle of Ambar. When the Muslims captured the city they found out that it was not only fortified but there was a wide and deep water trench around it. This trench was so close to the fortress wall that whoever dared to cross it became an easy target for the enemy arrows. Khalid (RA) found a place from where to attack the fortress where the trench was at its narrowest. He chose a favourable spot for the archers of the Muslim army from where they could engage the enemy archers in battle. After this he selected the weakest horses and camels from his cavalry, slaughtered them and threw them in the narrow part of the trench. After a little while the skeletons of the dead animals rose up to the surface of the water. In this way a unique, temporary bridge of animal skeletons was formed for the Muslim army to cross. One division of the army crossed the unusual bridge and reached the fortress wall. The enemy was perplexed and they readily agreed to a truce on easy conditions.

Another creative tactic which boggles one's mind was employed by Khalid (RA) after he had completed his conquest of Iraq. The Caliph Abu Bakr (RA) asked Khalid to proceed swiftly to Syria in order to add strength to the Muslim army present there. There were two routes to reach the war zone but both were very long. On both routes there was danger of being attacked by the Roman soldiers. A famous warrior Rafay Bin

Umaira revealed that he knew a shortcut across the desert. But it would be a monumental task to cross the desert terrain with a whole army because there would be no access to water for a period of five days on the journey. There was also the possibility of losing the way.

In the sweltering heat of June, Khalid (RA) vowed to cross the desert and had a brainwave that they would make 40 camels drink a lot of water and tie their mouths. Wherever there would be an urgent need for water, they would slaughter ten camels and use the water in their stomachs. One tradition tells us that by the third day the water supply was exhausted. To make matters worse, Rafay the sole guide on this journey gradually lost his eyesight. With the help of certain landmarks the Muslim army succeeded in reaching a water hole and thus an arduous journey ended which could have turned into a disaster but because of Khalid's ingenious tactics, the Muslim army managed to reach Syria in the shortest time possible.

Swift Movement of the Army

Another reason behind Khalid's success was his impulsive drive for swift action. He used to activate and urge his army on with such speed that the enemy force would be dumbfounded and would be unprepared to meet the Muslims. Inspite of being less in number and weapons, the Muslim army had an advantage over their adversaries. Before the opponent forces could gather under a single banner, the Muslim army would often overpower them by their quicksilver action.

Damascus was won over by the sword as mentioned earlier. But in his ignorance of the state of affairs, Abu Ubaidah (RA) was cornered into signing a pact of agreement with the enemy. Although Khalid (RA) was naturally disturbed when he found out, he had to abide by the terms of the agreement. One of the clauses of the pact was that the enemy could move their possessions in the next three days without any hindrance. The

Muslims did not disturb them for three days and they moved out with their possessions unobstructed. But on the fourth day, Khalid overtook them with such swift action that he was able to recover the booty that they had almost lost to the enemy. This was an amazing feat since the opponent forces had a three-day lead. Hercule's daughter was also arrested by the Muslims. He requested that she be freed from imprisonment. Khalid, being the magnanimous commander that he was, graciously returned her to her father safe and sound.

Selection of Battleground of own Choice

The choice of battleground is an important factor in the outcome of any battle. In the war against Iraq, Khalid (RA) was particularly careful that all the battles should be fought near the desert in such a way that if they needed to retreat, the vastness of the desert would work to their advantage. The Persian army could not imagine fighting in the desert terrain because their army had not been trained to do so. Hence the Muslim chose their own war zones on the borders of the desert and inhabited areas.

Exploitation of the Enemy's Weaknesses

Another practical strategy of Khalid's was to analyse the weaknesses of the enemy and take advantage of them. Also, he was aware of the strengths that his army possessed and he made full use of them. When a war strategy would fail, he would challenge the commander or important chiefs of the opposing army to fight a duel with him, in which invariably he or other Muslim warriors would kill them. This would break the morale of the whole army and they used to fight with less spirit, resulting in an easy victory for the Muslims.

In the battle of Maraj ul Safrah, Khalid (RA) was present with a small band of soldiers waiting for reinforcements. Meanwhile, the opposing army began the formation of their forces in order

to start the battle. It looked as if the rest of the Muslim soldiers would take some time to get to the battlefield. At this moment, Khalid started to exhibit feats of physical bravery in one to one duels. Both the Roman and the Muslim generals came face to face, each showing off personal acts of courage and skill. The advantage in employing this strategy was that the strong Roman chiefs were killed and enough time had been gained for the Muslim reinforcements to join the main army.

In the battle of Yarmouk, Khalid departed from his usual stance and commanded his forces to play a defensive game. When he felt that the Roman soldiers were tiring, he changed his position and ordered his army to adopt an aggressive strategy. Thus the Muslim army forced the enemy to retreat into a valley where Muslim archers were stationed – lying in wait for a signal from Khalid. In this way the Romans were trapped from both sides and lost the battle.

Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) was a mastermind at war games. His schemes were so practical and wise that they caused minimum loss of life in his army. He used to teach the enemy such a lesson that they would remember it for life and used to shatter their morale completely. His brilliant war strategies had earned him the repute of the most successful military commander ever. Major General Ibrahim Agha, in his book 'Saifullah', writes about Khalid,

"Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) was the most multi-talented and multi-faceted general in history. A truly superhuman soldier. His war strategies can be compared with those of Changez Khan and Napoleon Bonaparte. His foresight and prudence on the battlefield can be matched with Taimur Lung and Frederick The Great. His personal strength and valour was like the famous Persian wrestler Rustum. We do not find any other personality in this field possessing such diverse talents. Khalid was one of the two great conquerors in history who never faced defeat –

himself and Ghengis Khan."

Khalid's Humility and Strong Sense of Morality

If one analyses the great conquerors in history, it is obvious at a glance that their success was due to huge well-equipped forces with the help of which they trampled over small armies. It was just the opposite in Khalid's case. In many cases, he had a small ill-equipped army with which he managed to conquer the enemy forces on their own territory. By the grace of Allah, it was ordained that The Sword of Islam would not fail. And Khalid (RA) always attributed his conquests to Allah alone.

Whether it was the battle of Mautah, in which 3,000 Muslim soldiers clashed with an army of 100,000 unbelievers, or a handful of believers against the mighty Persian army, Khalid's confidence did not shake for a moment. He used to rely completely on the help of Allah inspite of his tremendous qualities and military achievements. He was never deterred by the strength of the opposing army. Once in the battle of Yarmouk, a soldier involuntarily exclaimed, "The Romans are so many and we are so few!" Khalid replied, "The Romans are so few and we are so many! The strength of the army does not lie in their numbers but on the aid of Allah. They are weak if the support of Allah deserts them."

Courage and Fearlessness

In most cases it has been observed that the commanders and generals of the army stay in the back lines while their soldiers do the fighting. They are very cautious about protecting their life. Khalid (RA) was in the habit of doing just the opposite. Instead of issuing orders from a safe position, Khalid (RA) used to fight in the first row along with the soldiers. Whether it was a fight with Hermuz, or with the giant warrior Hazaar Mard, or with the Roman Chief Azazeer (who was known for his agility and active nature), Khalid (RA) was never overpowered by any

opponent. On the occasion of the conquest of Hams he gave a crushing embrace to his Roman counterpart, to the extent that his bones were broken.

Obedience to the Caliphate

The most outstanding part of Khalid's character was his complete submission to the commands of the Caliph, inspite of his phenomenal record of conquests and his able leadership as the commander of the Muslim army. He demonstrated no hesitation in accepting the orders of Caliph Umar although they were very harsh ones like his demotion and then dismissal. He was quoted as telling a friend, " If Abu Bakr has died and Umar is the Caliph then we are now obedient to him."

The soldiers under Khalid's command highly admired him. If he had refused to obey the command of Caliph Umar and taken a stand, they might have sided with him and there would have been a serious rift in the Muslim empire. But Khalid (RA) was a humble soldier and he was faithful to the cause of Islam, so how could he cause such a mutiny. Normally it is an accepted practice that whenever there is such a change in the army, the commanding officer is either given the option to resign as a face saving measure or he is delegated to some other position keeping his status in mind. But Khalid (RA) was given no such choice. The world observed the amazing incident when this indefatigable warrior – whose name struck terror in the hearts of his enemies – on one order from his Caliph calmly stepped down from his position and acted like an ordinary soldier. When Abu Ubaidah (RA) needed his assistance, he extended his full support and guidance. There was never any hesitation or bitterness on his part.

There was great respect for the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) in Khalid's heart. He remembered the saying of the Prophet (SAW) regarding his eminent Companions (as mentioned in the previous pages). He gave due reverence to

those celebrated Companions of which they were worthy. If there had been any criticism or disdain on Khalid's part in this regard, then history would not have put him on the same pedestal as he is today inspite of his magnificent achievements.

Once in the course of events, when Khalid (RA) had recently been deposed from his position, the Muslims faced a situation of grave consequence. Abu Ubaidah (RA) had no choice but to turn to Khalid (RA) for advice. He briefed Khalid on the new developments on the war front and also expressed his embarrassment at asking him since Khalid (RA) had been asked to step down from his position. Khalid (RA) replied, "By Allah! Even if you had appointed a minor boy as my Ameer, I would have obeyed him. How can I disobey your orders? Your ranking in Islam is much higher than mine. The Prophet has named you Ameen ul Ummat (Trustee of the Muslim Ummah). I can never reach your status."

Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) – A Role Model

Often enough we have been instructed by Allah in the glorious Quran to fear no one but Him. Having understood this, how many of us are actually able to implement this order? Nowadays as in previous eras, we are surrounded by many kinds of trepidations – the fear of death, the fear of disaster and destruction, the fear of loss of wealth, the fear of losing status and many other apprehensions – all except the fear of Allah.

But when we look at Khalid's life, we find a deep-rooted fear of Allah and immense faith in His Mercy. He took numerous risks with his life and he was calm in the face of danger. He faced huge armies with meager resources and he traversed deserts and unknown terrain with nothing but hope in Allah's mercy.

Khalid (RA) was bold and courageous. An innovative and creative general, his mind was constantly working to find new military solutions to the problems and challenges thrown in his

way.

Today bookshelves abound with material on leadership qualities. Khalid (RA) was a born leader. He was magnanimous with his soldiers and looked after their needs. He was a shining example for them in the battlefield and fought in the front lines with them instead of giving instructions from the back. He motivated them to perform beyond their abilities and instilled hope and confidence in them. The soldiers under Khalid's command were completely under his sway. He could literally make them move mountains.

Had Khalid (RA) chosen to take advantage of their unswerving loyalty, he could have caused a serious rebellion against the Caliphate with the help of his forces, but as mentioned earlier, Khalid (RA) was a humble man and a true servant of Allah. He had pledged his loyalty to the Head of the Muslim empire, be it Abu Bakr or Umar. When he was dismissed, he took it as just another order to be followed. No frowns, no public complains, no resistance.

Khalid (RA) did his best to spread Islam in the conquered territories. Once in a battle, a Roman commander asked him if he had a sword from heaven sent by Allah. Khalid (RA) answered in the negative and explained how he came to be called the Sword of Allah. Then the commander asked him what Islam preached. Khalid replied, "We preach the worship of one God." The Roman further asked, "Will a convert today have the same reward from Allah as you when in fact you joined the faith before him?" Khalid affirmed, "Yes and more. We lived in the lifetime of Muhammad (SAW) and we saw his signs and miracles. It was very easy to accept Islam and believe in its messenger. As for you, you have not seen or heard the Prophet, but you still believe in the unseen, so your reward with Allah will be greater if you are sincere." The Roman commander requested Khalid (RA) to teach him more about Islam. He

became a Muslim and fought along with the Muslim army and died as a martyr.

When we look at military, social, political or other organizations around us, we find a constant wrestling for power – one party trying to malign and subjugate others to stay in power, colleagues battling for promotion resorting to unfair tactics, etc. Even in educational and religious institutions the larger benefit is ignored for petty personal benefits. When somebody's authority is taken away, he or she resorts to backbiting, bad-mouthing, bickering and complaining against the allegedly unjust decision. We have a lot to learn from the example of Khalid Bin Waleed (RA).

We see that Khalid Bin Waleed (RA) was probably the greatest general of all times, because of his superior war strategies, recognition of his duty, complete confidence in Allah, love for and dedication towards his mission, determined nature and tremendous physical and moral strength and courage. From focusing on the big picture to obeying the law, to responding with honesty and humility when facing a public trial – our hero is a perfect role model.

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UMAR BIN ABDUL AZIZ

Naima Sohaib

Muslim Heroes series No. 3

Translated by Eman Asif Misbah

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Foreword

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

Few authentic books are available in English on the subject of Muslim heroes. The ones that are there focus mainly on the Companions of the Prophet (SAW). Little is known to the general masses about the great personalities who had an impact on millions of Muslims – who came after the Companions. When I read Naima Sohaib's book on Muslim heroes, I realized that it filled a gap. I thought of translating it into English so that all segments of our society have access to it. The best part about this book is that it does not just contain stories of eminent people. It also focuses on the lessons that we need to learn from these sincere Momins – may Allah have mercy on them. This book has covered 20 Muslim heroes. Each hero is being presented as a separate booklet in English, and this is the third of the series after Ayesha (RA) and Khalid Bin Waleed (RA).

This booklet is about Umar Bin Abdul Aziz – well known as the Fifth Rightly Guided Caliph. In a short span of two and a half years he revived the period of benevolent rule that prevailed during the caliphate of Abu-Bakr Siddique (RA), Umar Farooq (RA), Usman Ghani (RA), and Ali (RA). Though he could not end the tradition of family rule, he demonstrated what an honest, competent and God-fearing individual could achieve despite all odds and intense opposition from within the ruling family. This has great lessons for Muslim rulers of all times.

I would like to thank Sana Dossal, Misbah Shakoor, and Sohaib Umar for their help with the editing and the formatting of this book, Nadeem Siddiqui for the design and my husband for his love and support.

Eeman Asif Misbah

Umar Bin Abdul Aziz

The Fifth Rightly Guided Caliph and the Mujaddid

(Reformer) of the Second Century Hijri

Introduction

His name was Umar and his kuniat Abu Hafs. Kuniat is a special name whereby the father is called after a child or a dear one. Umar Bin Abdul Aziz belonged to the royal family of Banu Umayya. His father was the son of Abdul Aziz Marwan and the prince of the family of Banu Umayya. In 65 Hijri he was appointed the governor of Egypt. He became well known because of his exceptional services as governor. His mother Umme Asim was the daughter of Asim Bin Umar, the son of Umar Farooq (RA), so she was the granddaughter of Umar (RA), the respected companion of the Prophet (SAW). There is an interesting story behind how the marriage of Asim took place.

One night Umar (RA) was taking a round of Medina as was his usual practice during his caliphate. When he got tired he rested against a wall. From a nearby house, he could hear a mother ordering her daughter to mix water with the milk that she would sell the next day. The girl replied that the Amir ul Mominin (the caliph) had forbidden this practice. The mother insisted that Umar was not present to see what she was doing. Her daughter was quick with her reply, "By Allah! It is not possible that when I am alone I disobey the caliph – because if he is not watching me, Allah certainly is!"

Umar (RA) listened to this whole conversation quietly, and was so impressed by the girl that he asked his servant to mark the

house and the door. In the morning, he was told that the girl was not married and her mother was a widow. Umar gathered all his sons together and asked them who needed a wife. He said that he would personally have married this wise girl if he had the desire but since he was old and had no need for a wife, he would like one of his sons to marry her. His son Asim agreed to this proposal and he and Laila, the milk-girl were married. The mother of Umar Bin Abdul Aziz was the daughter of these two, hence Umar Bin Abdul Aziz was the grandson of Umar (RA) from the maternal side.

Birth and Childhood

According to authentic traditions, Umar Bin Abdul Aziz was born in Medina in 63 Hijri.

When he was young, his maternal grandfather passed away. His mother's uncle and famous companion of the Prophet, Abdullah Bin Umar (RA), used to take special care of them. Umar was very attached to his maternal relations. He often visited Abdullah Bin Umar. When he returned from these visits, he would try to adopt the ways of his great-uncle. His mother Umme Asim used to encourage him in matters of religion. However, she thought it a great a challenge to reach a high status of the likes of Ibn Umar.

When Umar Bin Abdul Aziz's father was appointed the governor of Egypt, he called his family there to stay with him. In order to complete his education, Umme Asim while leaving for Egypt left her son in Medina with her uncle Abdullah Bin Umar (RA) at his suggestion. Abdullah Bin Umar (RA) knew that his grand-nephew was particularly attached to his maternal family. Hence he kept Umar with him. When Umar's father Abdul Aziz found out about this arrangement, he was delighted.

From his childhood, Umar had a streak of nobleness in him. We find one interesting childhood event in the annals of history.

Once he came to Egypt to visit his father. There he got injured when a donkey kicked him which made him fall and he suffered a minor injury on his forehead. When his brother Asbagh found out, he started to laugh. When his father got annoyed at him for making fun of his brother's injury, he replied, "I am not happy at his fall, I am happy at the fact that until now, Umar had all the markings of a righteous man, but he did not have the mark on his forehead." It was a famous prediction in the tribe of Banu Umayya that among their successors there would be a person who would have a mark on his forehead and he would fill the earth with justice. Perhaps some saintly person had seen this in a dream.

Education and Upbringing

Umar Bin Abdul Aziz had memorized the Quran as a child. This was the era when most of the companions of the Prophet (SAW) had left this world, handing over their treasure of knowledge to the Taba'een (next generation after the companions). Umar was fortunate in that he had exceptionally pious family links on his mother's side. Abdullah Bin Umar (RA) himself was his teacher; besides that, Swaleh Bin Kaisan (a famous Taba'ee) was his mentor, who took keen interest in his education as well as grooming.

Umar had a passion for dressing well since young age. Once when he was late for prayers, his teacher asked him for an explanation. He replied that he had been busy combing his hair. The teacher was surprised and admonished him for delaying his prayers because of his hair. Umar's parents found out about this incident. His father was well aware of his son's fondness for dressing up. He got Umar's head shaved to discourage his inclination towards fashion.

Other famous taba'eens like Ubaidullah Bin Utbah and Saeed Bin Musayyeb were also among those who taught Umar. We can thus assess the caliber of his education in his formative

years. By the time he completed his education and came to Egypt and Syria, he was considered an eminent scholar. The famous scholar Allama Zahbi writes, "Umar was a notable imam, a great scholar of Fiqh, a big Mujtahid (one who deduces solutions to new problems according to religious perspective) and was also a great and reliable scholar of Hadith."

Umar now became busy with the different posts he was assigned to in the kingdom and this prevented him from pursuing further his scholarly interests.

Marriage

After completing his education, Umar came back to his father in Egypt. In those days, there was a dispute between his father Abdul Aziz and his uncle Abdul Malik, regarding the heir apparent to the throne. Soon after, when Umar's father expired his uncle Abdul Malik was very regretful about their disagreement. He cried a lot and called Umar to the capital Damascus, where he treated him like his own son. Also, he arranged his marriage with his beloved daughter Fatima.

Fatima was a princess and had led a life of pomp and luxury. Umar's father had also left an immense fortune for his son. Both husband and wife had a luxurious lifestyle. Umar was a very fashionable young man. He used to dress in the finest of clothes, ate the best of delicacies, and rode fine horses. He rarely repeated his clothes. Some of his fine cloaks cost upto 800 dirhams, which was a lot of money in those times. According to Rija Bin Hayat, "Umar Bin Abdul Aziz was the most well-dressed man of his time, wearing the best of perfumes and exhibiting a gait of pride."

The Governorship of Medina

After the death of Abdul Malik in 87 Hijri, his son Waleed became the caliph and appointed Umar the governor of Medina.

At this time, Umar was merely 25 years old. He reached Medina with his wife and servants with such pomp and show that thirty camels carried their belongings.

Although his lifestyle was that of a prince of Banu Umayya, he was against the policy of oppressing the poor to fill the treasury of the state. When Waleed made him the governor of Medina, he hesitated in accepting the post. When he was questioned, he replied, "I cannot practice the tradition of increasing the wealth of the state at the expense of the poor!" At this, Waleed sent him a reply saying that he was to govern Medina with justice, even if he did not contribute a single dirham to the treasury.

As soon as Umar became the governor, he stopped the forceful exhortation of taxes from the poor and sent a notice to all the respectable elites that if there was any injustice he was to be notified. Ibn Hakam writes that inspite of his lavish lifestyle, Umar never resorted to earning a living through unlawful means, and never gave any order against the Shariah.

Umar believed in the philosophy of a welfare state. Hence he started big projects of social welfare. During his governance, wells were dug in the suburban areas of Makkah and Medina. The roads connecting Makkah, Medina and Taif were reconstructed so that the travelers would be comfortable on their journey. Another of his important works was the reconstruction of Masjid-e-Nabvi. Umar realized that the capacity of the mosque was inadequate to accommodate the increasing population, although both Umar (RA) and Usman (RA) had increased the dimensions of the mosque during their caliphate. Umar asked Waleed for his permission to reconstruct the mosque, which was granted. In a period of three years, the capacity of the Prophet's mosque was increased manifold and it was reconstructed to give it a face-lift. Umar himself took part as a worker in the construction. The mosque was beautified, and fountains, arches and ponds were added to its surroundings.

Another special characteristic of Umar's governance of Medina was that he included the scholars of Islam in his decision-making. He sent a special invitation to ten of Medina's most esteemed scholars to assist and counsel him in the running of Medina. This was not an exercise in ostentation but he truly valued the counsel and advice of these pious and learned men. Umar also asked them to lay down the foundation stone for Masjid-e-Nabvi.

Once Umar sent a messenger to the famous Taba'ee and his teacher, Saeed Bin Musayyeb to ask about an issue. The messenger instead of asking about the matter sent the scholar to Umar. When he saw his teacher, Umar was very regretful and told him, "Please go back; I will come myself to you to ask your counsel."

Because Umar valued religion so much, the scholars in Medina wished to keep in touch with him. When Umar left Medina, Saeed Bin Musyyeb raised both hands and prayed for him.

Dismissal or Resignation

As mentioned earlier, Umar hated any kind of oppression and injustice. That is why he had a firm dislike for the ruler of Iraq, Hajjaj Bin Yusuf, who was famous for his tyrannical and despotic rule. When Hajjaj intended to visit Medina after performing Haj, Umar wrote a letter to Waleed saying that he would not like Hajjaj visiting Medina. Waleed after reading the letter conveyed the sentiments to Hajjaj and asked him to comply with Umar's request. This caused a lot of rancour in Hajjaj's heart against Umar. According to one tradition, when Umar wrote a letter to Waleed about Hajjaj's tyrannies, Hajjaj also wrote a letter to Waleed complaining that Umar was giving refuge to the agitators in his domain. Waleed accepted the perspective of Hajjaj and dismissed Umar from his post.

Another tradition tells us that Khubaib, the son of Abdullah Bin

Zubair (RA), once did something to anger Waleed, who ordered Umar that Khubaib should be whipped a hundred times. Until now, in his six years of rule over Medina, Umar had not let Waleed interfere in his domain and had not accepted any unjust order from him. Whatever the circumstances, it appears that this command was carried out. Khubaib was a weak man physically and the perpetrator was harsh in his punishment. On reaching home, Khubaib could not bear the pain of the injuries and passed away. Upon hearing of Khubaib's death, Umar collapsed on the floor, and went into intense depression and regret. Umar did not care for his post or position in the face of such cruelty and resigned from his post.

Contradicting this tradition, Ibn Kaseer has stated with confidence that Umar did not resign but he was removed from his position. Whatever the true situation might be, it is obvious to all that Umar maintained a fair and just rule over Medina during his six years of governorship and became famous for his piety. After his dismissal, he returned to Damascus, the capital of the Muslim empire. He stayed with his royal cousins for the next six years and advised them in matters of the state. First Waleed and later Suleman Bin Abdul Malik would at times act on the advice given by Umar and at other times do things on their own. Once Umar and Caliph Suleman had an altercation. Matters worsened to the extent that Umar decided to move to Egypt. But in time, Suleman apologized and admitted that he was most upset at Umar's plans to move to Egypt.

Caliphate

In the month of Safar, 99 Hijri, caliph Suleman fell extremely ill. When he lost all hope of regaining his health, he issued an order to the royal princes to dress up in their finery and appear before him carrying swords. The princes were so young that they could barely handle their heavy robes, let alone lift their swords. When Suleman saw this state of affairs, he was

saddened. He consulted the famous scholar Rija Bin Hayat. When Rija suggested Umar's name, the caliph told him, "I will make such a nomination that Satan will have no part to play in it". Then he proceeded to nominate Umar Bin Abdul Aziz and then Yazeed Bin Abdul Malik after him. The political wisdom behind nominating the latter was that the caliph could not ignore the clan of Abdul Malik (the ruling Umayyad family).

According to another tradition, when Suleman was convinced that he would not survive for long, he wanted to nominate his son Ayub and then Daud for the caliphate. When he consulted Rija, he told him to select a noble candidate so that Suleman could die peacefully knowing that the caliphate was in able hands. Rija wanted to bring his attention to his cousin Umar. The caliph was still unconvinced about what decision to take. He asked, "What do you think of my son, Daud?" Rija replied that he was currently involved in a war in Constantinople and there was uncertainty about his return since a large part of his force had already been killed. Then Suleman inquired about Umar. Rija was quick to give his approval and praised Umar's pious and noble nature. Thus Suleman nominated Umar Bin Abdul Aziz and then Yazeed as successors. With his own hands, he wrote out the nomination papers. He gathered his entire family around Rija and got their consent for his decision.

After the death of Suleman, Rija hid this information for a while and took a unanimous vote in favour of Umar Bib Abdul Aziz once again so that there would be no dispute later. After the people had pledged their loyalty then he disclosed the news of Suleman's death. He then proceeded to read out the nomination orders of the caliph.

When the papers were read out, Umar was present in the crowd. He panicked because he had already told Rija to decide against him if the caliph nominated him. Umar approached Rija and beseeched him to take back the nomination orders on account of

their friendship and for the sake of Allah. He did not want to take on such a heavy responsibility. But Rija would not agree with him under any circumstances. With extreme reluctance, Umar stepped onto the pulpit, reciting "Inna lillahi wa inna ilaehi rajioon" (recited at the time of death or sorrow). Then he spoke out to the people, "By Allah! I never aspired to become the caliph secretly or openly." Then he gave a sermon in which he proclaimed, "O people! This position has been thrusted upon me without my consent. In this decision, the counsel of the Muslims was not taken. I release you all from the pledge that you have taken. Choose whoever you will for this post." The people unanimously replied, "We have chosen you and we are pleased with you."

The only person to protest against this decision was Hisham Bin Abdul Malik, but he was strongly put down by Rija.

The Difference Between Caliphate and Kingship

Before we talk about the challenges to Umar Bin Abdul Aziz and how he faced them, it is necessary to highlight the difference between caliphate and kingship. The cornerstones of caliphate during the times of the rightly guided caliphs were the council of advisors, respect for public opinion and their right to choose their ruler. The rightly guided caliphs had very high standards of excellence and were very pious people. Their hearts always trembled with the fear of Allah. In matters of justice they did not distinguish between friend and stranger. They were very cautious in spending the wealth of the state treasury. Not a single dirham was spent for undue reasons. Their personal lives were very simple. The awareness of the fact that they would be held accountable for their deeds in the Hereafter, particularly with respect to the rights of those governed, made them vigilant and unable to rest peacefully for a single moment.

After the death of Ali (RA), Amir Muaviyah (RA) became the

next caliph. He belonged to the family of Banu Umayya. He nominated his son Yazeed after him. This way of nomination was alien to the Muslims. Muaviyah was a companion of the Prophet (SAW) and he had experienced the era of the Prophet (SAW) as well as the glorious rule of the rightly guided caliphs. Hence after becoming the caliph, he tried to establish his rule on the same foundations as his predecessors. But the nomination of Yazeed changed the caliphate into a kingdom and the trend of dictatorship entered into the Islamic world.

All the special foundations and ground rules laid down by the Prophet (SAW) and his companions were discarded one by one. Firstly, injustice and oppression became the order of the day and the innocent were victimized. The reason for this was that the common Muslims had no say in the creation of Banu Umayya's kingdom. When the system of caliphate fell apart, the people raised a hue and cry and became strong opponents of the tyranny imposed upon them. Hence we see that in the reign of Yazeed, the bloody assassination of Imam Hussain (RA) took place which shook the entire Islamic empire. Waves of discontent and anger could be felt everywhere. The people started hating Banu Umayya and developed a strong sympathy for the household of the Prophet (SAW) commonly referred to as Ahl e Bait.

The government in their sermons started maligning Ali (RA) and his family which further stoked the fire of discontent. When the supporters of Ali who believed that the caliphate should only reside with the family of the Prophet (SAW) started speaking against the caliphs of Banu Umayya, they were punished severely. Any kind of political opposition was unacceptable and was made a target for persecution. The Caliph Suleman meted out harsh treatment on the basis of personal enmity and he tortured many famous Muslim generals and honourable persons. The well-known conqueror of Sindh Muhammad Bin Qasim was put to death. Likewise, the

mastermind behind the conquest of Spain, Moosa Bin Nusair was targeted for persecution and was badly humiliated (Tariq Bin Ziyad who won the war at Gibralter was a general in Moosa's Army).

If this wasn't enough, Banu Umayyah used Hajjaj Bin Yusuf to increase the domination of the ruling family at any cost. He was such a cruel man that he rained stones on the Kabah on one occasion, laid siege to Medina on another occasion and gave orders for the murder of Abdullah Bin Zubair, Saeed Bin Jubair and other pious companions and Taba'een.

Inspite of the magnificent principles of social and economic justice laid down in Islam, the ruling family of Banu Umayya treated the new non-Arab converts in a hostile manner. Not only were they not given their equal rights as fellow Muslims, they were also subjected to unjust policies. Every new governor would impose new taxes on them. During Hajjaj's rule, they had to pay Jizya as well (a tax imposed on non-Muslims). This went on to such an extent that some converts left the fold of Islam and became rebels.

The only purpose of these unjust taxes was to fill the state treasury with wealth, which had become the personal treasury of the caliph. The resources of the state were at his discretion to be used for his comfort and to support his luxurious lifestyle. Palaces were constructed for the royal family. The Umayyid Caliphs were so obsessed about their security that when Caliph Waleed went to Medina to inspect the reconstruction job of Masjid-e-Nabvi, the whole mosque was emptied of people before he stepped in.

This system of government was opposed to the spirit of Islam and possessed all the bad characteristics of a monarchy. It had not been long since the era of the Prophet (SAW) and his Companions. The masses in general and the scholars, the taba'een and the taba-taba'een in particular hated the non-

Islamic practices that had filtered in the caliphate. But the powerful ruling family was so brutal that they ruthlessly suppressed any kind of protest. We have before us the examples of the atrocities committed on Imam Hussain (RA) and Abdullah Bin Zubair (RA). Hence these noble persons for the time being chose to remain silent in the face of such extreme persecution.

Umar Bin Abdul Aziz – The Fifth Rightly Guided Caliph

This state of affairs was not hidden from Umar Bin Abdul Aziz who used to counsel his cousins heading the caliphate. But his best efforts could not bring a change in their way of governance. Now the burden of the caliphate had fallen on Umar's shoulders. It was such a heavy burden to bear that at first he wanted to disentangle himself from its clutches. He accepted that people ought to be free to choose their caliph and proposed to resign. The people knew his character very well. They had been reluctantly accepting the rule of the tyrannical chiefs of Banu Umayya. They knew Umar was the best choice among them all. Hence they all voted for the leadership of Umar and did not accept his resignation.

Immediately after this election, a group of horses was brought for Umar's transport. A grand arrangement of tents and decorative floors was prepared for him. Umar stated that he had no need for all this pomp and show. Then he ordered his servant Mazahim to deposit these in the state treasury. According to the custom, a team of guards started walking with him for his defense. Umar found this to be very offensive. He told them, "I don't need you. I am also a Muslim like other Muslims." Then he went to his house. H e informed his wife Fatima about his appointment as a caliph. Then he demanded her to deposit all her jewelry and other expensive possessions in the state treasury. He gave her the option of either living with him or leaving him. Fatima was a princess, but she was a noble

person and had a kind and God-fearing nature. Living with a person like Umar had also made an impact on her personality. She agreed to his demand.

The next day the family of the deceased caliph, Suleman, sent all the expensive furniture and other stuff to the house of the new caliph. When Umar found out, he deposited the items into the public treasury. He was presented with beautiful slave-girls who were unique in their beauty. On his orders, they were sent back to their families and households

Caliphate – A Trust

The burden of the caliphate took away any peace of mind that Umar possessed. He forgot about his wealth, estate and worldly desires. He became so careless about these things that his wife Fatima says, "Umar had dedicated himself to the Muslims. He used to think about them all the time. If their grievances were not redressed by evening time, he would continue working late in the night. When he would finish his work, he would ask for a lantern, pray two rakats of salat, then he would lower his head in his hands, and tears would fall down his cheeks. He used to cry with such intensity that it would appear that his heart would burst and he would collapse and die. Then dawn would arrive and he would keep a fast.

Sometimes I would go near him and ask if I did not have the same rights on him as I did before. He would tell me to leave him on his own. I used to request him to talk to me. He used to reply that he had been made the guardian of this Ummah, that all he could remember was the hungry, the poor, the travelers who had no one to help them, and the innocent prisoners, and the people who had little wealth and such others occupying different territories and different countries. He would say that he knew Allah (SWT) would question him about them, and so would Prophet Mohammad (SAW). He was fearful that Allah would not accept his excuses and the Prophet (SAW) would not

listen to his logic."

Umar was aware that the caliphate was not his personal right but a trust given to him by Allah. He knew that all the wealth accumulated by the ruling family had actually been obtained through tyrannical policies and unfair taxes from the poor people. He felt that as a caliph he should feel the actual pain that the masses were suffering. It could only be possible if he came down to their level to assess things. This created a revolution in his life. The same Umar Bin Abdul Aziz whose shawl used to cost 800 dirhams now wore ordinary attire. He used to be displeased at any formal protocol given to him. Also, he dismissed the custom of sending blessings (durood) on the caliph after the prayers, and stated: "Durood is only reserved for the Prophet (SAW) and prayers should be said for all the Muslims. If I am one of them then I would be automatically included."

The trend that he introduced was a novel one for the family and servants of Banu Umayya. Once at a funeral a special sheet was laid for Umar to sit on. He removed the sheet with the end of a walking stick and sat with the rest of the Muslims.

The Process of Reforms and the Return of Usurped Wealth

Umar Bin Abdul Aziz had started the process of change and improvement with his own self. But a thought was constantly nagging him. How would all the wealth that had been accumulated in the previous eras by his family members be accounted for? He knew that the properties owned by his relatives had been usurped from others by unfair means. This was a delicate issue. While expressing his thoughts one day, he said to his servant Mazahim, "There are some estates in our possession over which we have no right. We should not have accepted these properties. Now that the caliphate has come to

me, it is incumbent upon me to account for them." Mazahim inquired what would happen to his children if he gave away the properties. Umar replied that Allah would provide them with sustenance. Mazahim discussed this issue with Umar's son Abdul Malik who was even more pious than his father. He came running to his father and told him to act upon his intention and not to worry about them. Umar Bin Abdul Aziz spoke, "Next Friday there should be a public announcement in the mosque regarding these unlawful properties." The noble son asked if he was certain that he would be alive till Friday since this temporary life could not be trusted. He urged that there should be no delay in performing acts of goodness.

Umar Bin Abdul Aziz was very pleased with his son's support on his decision. Immediately, he made an announcement in the mosque that anyone whose property had been unlawfully seized by Umar's forefathers could come and reclaim it. Then he proceeded to return his entire property to the rightful owners, to the extent that he even returned his ring, given to him by Waleed, to the state treasury. Then he gathered his family members together and said, "O Bani Marwan! You have received a large share of wealth and honour. I think half or two-thirds of the wealth of the Ummah is in your possession."

When his family members became aware of his intention, they lost control of their emotions. They exclaimed, "By God! Till our heads are severed from our bodies, we will not return these estates!" Umar Bin Abdul Aziz replied in an equally loud voice, "By God! If you don't do the rightful thing, I will leave you in a wretched state." After that, he made a speech in the mosque in which he ensured the people that they would get their properties back.

Umar then ordered for the chest containing the documentation of the estates to be brought before him. Mazahim would read out one document after another and Umar Bin Abdul Aziz

would cut them up with a pair of scissors. The most important issue was that of the area of Fidak, which was under his own control, and the income of most of his family and relatives came from this estate. This area had specifically been the property of the Prophet (SAW) who used to distribute the earnings to the needy ones in his clan and the clan of Banu Hashim. The Rightly Guided Caliphs had also maintained this order. In the later Umayyad rule, it was made the personal property of Marwan Bin Hakm. Umar had inherited one portion of this estate through his father and now the other portion also came under his possession as the ruler after the demise of Waleed and Suleman. Umar Bin Abdul Aziz pronounced, "Rasool Allah (SAW) used to use the land of Fidak for the sake of Allah. The same was done by Abu Bakr and Umar. When Marwan took over this property by force, I also chanced to inherit a part of it. I am depositing this illegally inherited property back in the state treasury so that it can be used for the same purpose as it was used in the time of the Prophet (SAW)."

He also renounced the land of Yamama and gave it back to the treasury. Besides depositing his personal cash of 40,000 dirhams, he surrendered the clothes of his wife and the jewels that he had inherited from her father. His wife Fatima had a slave-girl whom he liked. After becoming the caliph, he asked the slave-girl one day, "How did you come into the possession of Fatima?" She answered that Hajjaj Bin Yusuf had put a penalty on the ruler of Kufa. She was owned by the ruler who gave her to Hajjaj, and Hajjaj passed her on to Abdul Malik who was the father of Fatima. Umar further asked what was the state of that ruler of Kufa. She informed him that he was dead but that his children were living in a poor condition. Umar Bin Abdul Aziz summoned the family and returned their possessions including the slave-girl to them. When she was leaving, the slave-girl asked Umar, "What happened to your love for me?" He replied, "It is still there; in fact its intensity has increased."

In the entire Muslim empire, all the rulers and governors were advised that illegal properties were to be returned to their rightful heirs. When this mission was embarked upon, the treasury of Iraq became empty. The salaries given to Banu Umayya were discontinued. Also, the custom of giving allowances and expensive gifts to the favourites of the caliphs was also put to an end.

Opposition of the Family

The clan of Banu Umayya did not imagine in their wildest dreams that a man of their own family would declare their entire holdings to be illegal and return them to the rightful owners. Further, it was impossible to even think that their allowances and salaries would be suspended. Subsequently, the whole family gathered and decided to send their aunt to knock some sense into her nephew. This aunt had also lost all her privileges, hence she appeared before Umar Bin Abdul Aziz to plead the case of the entire clan and to question the sudden suspension of her income. Umar replied, "O my dear Aunt! My uncle Abdul Malik and my cousins Waleed and Suleman used to give you allowances from the Bait ul Maal (state treasury). This wealth is not mine. I can give you a grant from my own possessions." The aunt inquired how much he possessed. He replied that he received 200 dirhams annually. His aunt sorrowfully replied that she had no use for it (being such a petty amount).

Another tradition tells us that Umar asked for a dinar and heated it over a fire. Then he put a morsel of meat on it which burned to a crisp. Umar said, "O Aunt! Beware that your nephew will meet a similar end!" The aunt went back with a small face to Banu Umayya and told them, "You marry into Umar's (RA) family and when his offspring turns out to be on the maternal side, you make a hue and cry. Now be patient." (Remember that the mother of Umar Bin Abdul Aziz was the granddaughter

of second caliph Umar Bin Khattab).

After this, Hisham Bin Abdul Malik came to Umar and suggested that he should leave the past alone and should only decide matters that occurred in the present. Umar replied, "I would judge every matter brought to me according to the Book of Allah, be it current or of the past."

A nephew of Umar sent him a harsh letter and accused him of breaking family ties. Umar replied in equally harsh terms, "If I had enough time I would take every bit of Allah's property from you people and distribute it amongst the Muslims. You and your family have been accustomed to oppressing the people for long. By God, you deserve to be made slaves and sold off and your price be distributed among widows and orphans. Even after this you won't be able to compensate for the excesses you have been perpetuating on the Muslims."

The Withdrawal of Illegitimate Taxes

After disposing off the illegal holdings of Banu Umayya, Umar turned his attention to the state treasury. A large portion of it was collected by unfair means. Further, the wealth was not distributed according to the Shariah. The poor and needy often did not benefit from the distribution system.

The first step Umar took was to stop the exploitation of the poor in terms of unfair taxes. He observed that there were too many taxes levied on the masses. There were taxes on melting of silver, submitting applications, shops, houses, windmills and even on marriages. Umar did away with all these taxes which relieved the masses of the crippling burden and they breathed a sigh of relief. In the days of Hajjaj, Jizya (a tax levied on non-Muslims) was collected from those newly-converted to Islam, in gross violation of Shariah and an unwelcome innovation in the religion. Umar ended this unfair tax. This resulted in people converting to Islam en masse especially in Egypt, causing a

heavy depletion of the income of the state, so much so that the government had to borrow funds to furnish allowances. When an official complained, he remarked, "The Prophet (SAW) was sent as a guide, not as a tax officer (to exhort taxes from the people)."

The strange thing was that despite the reduction in the number of taxes and the leniency showed in their collection, the period of Umar Bin Abdul Aziz exhibited a remarkable increase in the amount collected after the initial period of difficulty. He himself stated proudly, "May Allah send His curse on Hajjaj; he was incompetent both in worldly and religious matters. Umar Bin Khattab (RA) collected 10 crores 28 lacs from Iraq, Ziyad collected 10 crores 25 lacs, and Hajjaj inspite of his unjust rule netted an amount of just 2 crores 80 lacs from the people. Despite the scarcity in Iraq, when it came under my command, I collected a sum of 10 crores 24 lacs from there, and if I am alive I will collect an even bigger amount than Umar Bin Khattab."

Umar considered the treasury to be a sacred trust and took precautions to safeguard the interest of the public. He would take extra care in spending public money. If a single coin went missing, an inquiry would be carried out. Non-productive government expenses were reduced. When he was asked to increase the budget for stationary for official use, he ordered, "Use your pens thinly and word your letters closely in every line. Be careful in your expenditure. I do not want to approve of any expense from the state treasury which is of no benefit to the people." His written orders were also short and concise. All the governors were notified to use small writing and smaller size of paper in order to conserve resources.

On a personal level, he was extremely cautious. When doing any personal work, he used to make sure that his own lantern was used and not the state utilities. When he was offered water for ablution which had been warmed over coals owned by the

state, he returned the water. At times, his servants did not exercise much care in these matters. Once his servant brought honey for him while riding an official horse that belonged to the post office. Umar Bin Abdul Aziz sold the honey and deposited the amount in the state treasury.

This caution extended to the members of his household as well. Once his daughter sent him a precious stone and requested that he find a similar one from the state treasury so that she could wear a matching pair of earrings. In response to her request, he sent two embers of fire.

Contrast this cautious approach in personal matters with the generosity demonstrated in spending money for rightful purposes. Lists of the names of the poor were compiled. A special allocation was made for the loan repayments of those deserving. Allowances were fixed for suckling infants. At many places, food was distributed freely among the poor and the needy. When the funds in the state treasury were employed to relieve the disabled and the needy, within a year the recipients of charity became the donors and the general condition of the masses improved dramatically. We know through authentic traditions that when officials would go out in search of deserving people to distribute charity, they could not find any in this category.

Careful Selection of Governors and Their Accountability

Banu Umayya had not been selective in their choice of governors/officials and they had also given them free reign to behave as they wished. As long as the administrators carried out the orders of the caliph, just or unjust, the ruling family would remain happy with them. They did not care about the common man suffering under their tyrannical rule.

Immediately after becoming the caliph, Umar dismissed three rulers who were known for their oppressive governance, and for

giving punishment without due reason. The entire family of Hajjaj Bin Yusuf was expelled from Yemen and their allies who were at important posts were dismissed. A cruel practice in vogue was the forced reduction in prices of products which were purchased by the government at low prices. This practice was most prevalent in Persia. Umar wrote to the officials there, "It has come to my knowledge that your subordinates purchase fruits at unjustly low prices and then extort taxes on the fruits from the travelers. If I happen to find out that this practice is being carried out with your knowledge or your approval I will not spare you."

While appointing officials Umar Bin Abdul Aziz used to keep certain principles in mind; that they should not be his relatives, that they should not ask for the post, that they should not be tyrannical, rather they should be well-versed with the Quran and be devout followers of Islam. For his personal advisory council he had appointed competent individuals like Rija Bin Hayat, Maimoon Bin Mehran and his pious son Abdul Malik.

After selecting the officials, he used to liaise with them regularly. He sent them letters of advice to guide them in their job. If there were complaints from the subjects against the rulers, he carried out an investigation. Those rulers whose performance was not up to the standard were removed. He was not in favour of meting out strict punishments. Rather, he thought they were answerable to Allah for their actions.

Protection of the Rights of Non-Muslim Subjects

Umar Bin Abdul Aziz paid great attention to the rights of Zimmis (non-Muslim subjects). Previously no one cared about their life or property. Jizya (tax) was collected from them through unfair means. Umar made the blood-money of a non-Muslim equal to that of a Muslim. Any Muslim who usurped the property of a non-Muslim was given strict punishment. The officials were instructed not to adopt harsh measures when they

went to collect taxes from them. Measures were taken to provide allowances from the state treasury for the disabled or needy non-Muslims. Their usurped properties were returned to them. Thus they were given a respectable status in the society. This was reflected in law courts too where the royal family members had to stand side by side with the non-Muslims in hearings. Once Hisham Bin Abdul Malik and on another occasion Muslima Bin Abdul Malik were placed together with a Zimmi in a case hearing to which they both objected. Umar told them to get a lawyer if they had a problem with standing together with a non-Muslim.

Rule of Justice

The more advanced a society is, the better its system of administering justice. The rule of law is an important indicator of the moral health of a people. A government cannot be called Islamic if it inherently practices injustice. The Umayyad period saw a decline in moral and economic justice and a good example was the usurping of properties by unfair means mentioned earlier. The Umayyad kings in their time would imprison anyone without a trial about whom they had the slightest suspicion. Suleman and his appointees used to make their opponents blind, break their hands and feet, imprison them and make them starve. Hajjaj was famous for spilling blood over the minutest of crimes.

For Umar bin Abdul Aziz these practices were intolerable. He discontinued the law of imprisoning without any proof. He also put an end to the barbaric system of giving women as blood-money in exchange for a man. There were some areas where people were kidnapped, enslaved and forced to work for free. Umar abolished this practice altogether.

Restoration of Rights of Banu Hashim

Banu Umayya took away the rights enjoyed by Banu Hashim to

a large extent. Umar Bin Abdul Aziz made sure that all their privileges were returned to them. To the extent that Fatima Bint Hussain (daughter of Imam Hussain) sent him a letter of gratitude for his kind treatment. Since the beginning of the Umayyad rule, the Friday sermons used to contain derogatory words against Ali (RA). As soon as Umar became the caliph, he sent an order to all the governors to stop the use of derogatory words for the eminent companion of the Prophet (SAW). He replaced those words with this verse from the Quran:

"Allah adjoins justice, kindness and charity to relatives, and forbids vulgarity, wrong-doing and tyranny. Maybe you will understand."

This verse is quoted to this day in Friday sermons all over the Muslim world.

Improvement of Prisons

It is usual to find governments who do not care about the condition of their citizens to be oblivious to the situation in prisons. Before the caliphate of Umar Bin Abdul Aziz, the jails were in a deplorable state of affairs. Prisoners were treated like creatures from another planet. Their basic health, sanitary, nutritional and other needs were completely neglected. To the extent that when they died their shrouds were not arranged. The inmates would collect funds from each other to perform the last rights of a deceased comrade.

Umar Bin Abdul Aziz took a serious view of the situation and advised his governors repeatedly to adopt measures to improve the condition. He passed orders for the construction of bright and spacious prison cells instead of the prevalent dreary ones. The governors were responsible for redressing the pleas of the inmates. Provisions were made for the basic needs of the prisoners. They were to be provided with blankets in the winter season and cool shirts in the summer. Their medical expenses

were to be taken care of by the government. Separate prisons were to be built for the women prisoners. If an inmate died in jail, the state would be responsible for the last rites and burial. Prisoners were to be released from their chains in the night and during prayer times. Thus like other classes of people, the prisoners breathed a sigh of relief during the philanthropic rule of Umar Bin Abdul Aziz.

Revival of Shariah

The masses of a country generally follow the example laid down by the rulers. They get influenced by the values that the rulers possess. The Umayyad era was a reign of kingship and royalty. Hence materialism had set in. The main topics of conversation among people were wealth, women and buildings. The knowledge and implementation of Shariah were no longer given prime importance. The first attack was on the Islamic belief system. Instead of focusing on implementation of basic and simple Islamic principles, people began to indulge in arguments and philosophical talk. When the conversation turned to fatalism, Umar made every effort to turn the people away from this useless discussion. He called Ghailan Damashqi, the one who was stimulating these discussions of fatalism, and asked him to seek forgiveness of Allah. Once a man inquired about a complex issue. Instead of answering him Umar Bin Abdul Aziz gave him this priceless advice: "Adopt the religion of school children and of bedouins in the desert." (meaning that simplicity of religious beliefs is required).

Besides the beliefs the next hit was performance of religious duties which people started to neglect. People had begun to ignore the timings of prayers. Umar Bin Abdul Aziz ordered his governors to leave all work at the time of salah, stating "the one who is negligent about prayers is the one who is most negligent about all Islamic duties."

It came to his notice that like in the times of ignorance, women

were indulging in wailing and loud mourning over the deceased. He sent an order to all top officials, “I have heard that the women of ignorance indulge in weeping and tearing their hair out over their dead. Stop this kind of mourning at once.” He also sent instructions regarding the rising trend of singing and music, “the non-Arabs used to seek pleasure in activities that Satan had made dear to them. Stop the Muslims from indulging in frivolous activities and those who refuse to obey should be chastised with a mild punishment.”

Similarly public baths were common in which men and women used to take baths without much care for modesty and dignity. Umar barred women from entering these public bathrooms and made sure that the men wore a loin-cloth while taking a bath. The walls of the bathrooms used to have vulgar pictures on them. Umar Bin Abdul Aziz ordered for such pictures to be erased. Once he erased some of these paintings himself and stated that if he had known the name of the artist he would have surely punished him.

Besides other frivolities drinking had become a common trend. People would ferment alcohol on the pretext of making Nabeez, a sweet drink. Then they would get intoxicated and behave in an inappropriate manner. When they were questioned about their behaviour they would feel no shame in acting in an obnoxious manner. Umar took full measures to eliminate this menace and issued directives to the effect that non-Muslims could no longer bring alcohol to the cities. The wine shops and cellars were closed down.

Compilation of Hadith

Umar Bin Abdu Aziz was a scholar and he recognized the value of knowledge. He was afraid that after the eminent scholars would pass away, they would take the treasure of Ahadith with them. He ordered the governor of Medina Qazi Abu Bakr to begin the compilation of Ahadith. Once compiled he

distributed the same to all parts of the Islamic empire. According to one tradition, piles and piles of Ahadith were recorded. This was the first effort at the government level to compile the existing Ahadith into a collection.

Benevolent Works

Extensive plans were made in the reign of Umar for the benefit of the poor and the needy. Road inns were built. Instructions were issued to the effect that whoever passed by these motels should be offered one day of free services and his riding animal should be taken care of. Free food kitchens were arranged to provide food for the needy and the beggars. The state pastures were opened to the public for the grazing of their animals.

Conquests

No memorable victories on the battlefield took place during the period of Umar Bin Abdul Aziz. He was one of those rulers whose eyes were constantly on the internal reforms of his empire rather than the expansion of his territory. However, the excursions which had been pre-planned were completed. During this period Muslims conquered a large part of Southern France.

Umar Bin Abdul Aziz was lucky not to have internal strife and civil wars during his caliphate. He hated bloodshed. Even the Kharajites who had created problems for every government remained relatively peaceful. Their presence had always been a threat to every Islamic government. Umar resolved their differences in a conciliatory manner and forbade the use of arms against them. The governor of Kufa was instructed not to altercate with them unless the instigation was from their side, and a wise man be appointed to negotiate with them. He also invited the leader of the Kharajites to an open forum to discuss the opposing viewpoints and said that the argument which had the most weight in terms of truth would be accepted.

Still, we see that towards the end of Umar's rule, the Kharajites again showed their true colours and created dissension and strife. The ruler of Kufa was given permission to launch an offensive against them but with certain conditions – that no woman, child or prisoner would be killed, the injured would not be chased on the battlefield, the spoils of war that would come into their hands would be returned to the family of the Kharajites, and the prisoners of war would only be detained till they repented and reformed themselves.

Death

The improvements in Umar's caliphate were gaining momentum when he fell ill in 101 Hijri in the month of Rajab. According to one tradition, his illness was due to natural causes while another tradition tells us that he was poisoned. Umar's reorganization and reforms had made Banu Umayya very insecure about their future, so they paid one of his slaves a sum of 1000 coins to poison him. This account further tells us that Umar found out about this treachery but instead of punishing the culprits and taking revenge, he merely ordered the amount to be returned to the state treasury.

For a few days, he remained sick. When little hope remained of his recovery, his brother-in-law Muslima Bin Abdul Malik came to him and said, "O Leader of the Believers, you have always kept your children away from the riches and you are leaving them empty-handed. Before you die, instruct me or someone else about your family."

Umar Bin Abdul Aziz answered, "You want me to leave a will for them. In this issue, my helper and supporter is Allah. If my sons are fearful of Allah, he will provide a way for them and if they indulge in a life of sin, then I don't want to increase them in sin by leaving them an inheritance." Then he called his sons and addressed them with tears in his eyes:

“May my life be sacrificed for you, my sons whom I kept in want, in poverty. But I thank Allah that I am leaving you in a good state. You will never meet an Arab or a non-Muslim who would claim any right upon you. My children! Your father had two options before him. One was to choose the life of luxury for you and hell for himself. The second was to keep you tight and in want and he would enter heaven. Your father chose the second option. May Allah keep you in His protection. He will provide for you.”

Before he died he recited this Quranic verse repeatedly, “The home in the hereafter is for those who choose not to dominate in the earth or create dissension, and the hereafter is only for the God-fearing.” When he was in the throes of death, he told everyone to leave the room. Muslima and Umar’s wife Fatima were outside his door. They heard a voice saying, “What blessed faces, which are neither of men nor of Jinns.” Muslima told his sister that Umar must have died. When they went in to check, Umar’s soul had departed from his body. He died on a Friday, 101 Hijri and at the time he was just 39 or 40 years old. He was buried in the area of Dir Samaan. The duration of his caliphate had been a mere two years and five months.

At the time of his death, Umar Bin Abdul Aziz had eleven sons. He left them an amount of 17 dirhams only, out of which five were spent on his shroud and two on his grave. Thus he did not even leave one dirham each for his children. Hisham Bin Abdul Malik, who was Umar’s uncle became one of the future caliphs. He also had eleven sons and he left them an inheritance of ten lacs each. But one of Umar’s sons was in later years seen distributing 100 horses in Allah’s way, and out of the sons of Hisham, one was spotted asking for charity. Hence Allah accepted the prayer of Umar regarding the provisions to his children.

His Distinguishing Traits

Fear of Allah

Fear of Allah was the most dominant trait in Umar's personality. He was always fearful of the wrath of Allah and His divine punishment, and of the fact that the time to do good deeds in this life could end any moment. His wife states, "He wasn't ahead of others in terms of prayers or fasting, but no one was more God-fearing than him. He used to start shivering in bed when he remembered Allah." Because of his fear he could not sleep at night. When he mentioned this to a companion once he asked the reason, to which Umar replied, "I was thinking about the grave and the condition of people in the grave; if we looked at the dead body three days later, it would be a gruesome sight, worms would be crawling over it, and pus would be coming out." Saying these words, Umar collapsed out of intense fear.

Umar Bin Abdul Aziz remembered death so frequently that his contemporary Yazeed Bin Khoshab commented, "I have never known anyone to fear death more than Umar and Hasan Basri. Looking at their intense fear of death, it seemed as if hell was only designed for the two of them."

Humility and Modesty

Humility was another dominant trait in Umar's personality. This characteristic became prominent after he became the caliph. We find this humility reflected time and again and there are numerous examples. Once when he found people standing in his honour he stated, "O People! If you keep standing I will also have to stand and if you sit then I can also sit. We should only stand before Allah (in prayers)!"

Similarly once when Rija Bin Hayat came to visit him, the flame in the lantern burnt out. A servant was sleeping nearby.

Rija asked him if he should wake him up. But Umar asked him to let the servant sleep. Rija suggested that he himself should light the flame. Umar replied that it would be inconsiderate to make a guest perform a chore. Ultimately, Umar got up himself, took some olive oil, and lit the wick. Then stated, "When I got up to perform this task I was Umar Bin Abdul Aziz and when I returned I am still the same." (meaning to say that this humble task did not reduce his stature).

Once a female slave was fanning him when she dozed off. Umar Bin Abdul Aziz took the fan and gave her the same treatment. When she woke up she was very embarrassed. To which Umar replied, "You are a human like me. I wanted to give you the same comfort as you gave me by fanning you."

Spirit of Forgiveness

Umar's nature was full of forgiveness and mercy. Once he entered the mosque at night. A man was sleeping there. In the darkness, Umar's feet accidentally tripped over him. The man screamed, "Are you crazy?" Umar simply replied, "No." His servant wanted to punish this uncouth man instantly but Umar restrained him and explained that the man had merely asked him if he was mad to which he replied in the negative.

We find another example of his forgiving nature. Once when after hours of hard work, Umar was getting up for his afternoon nap, a man approached him with some documents. Because of his carelessness, the file hit Umar's face. The papers cut his cheek and it started to bleed. But he still attentively read the person's application and attended to his need.

Patience and Tolerance

Umar had the patience of a saint. He experienced a very tough period in his life when his most able and dearest son Abdul Malik, his favourite brother Sahal Bin Abdul Aziz and his most

loyal servant Mazahim died within a short span of time. When people visited him to offer their condolence, they found him to be patient and grateful. One day a contemporary scholar Rabi came to him to offer his condolence. Hearing his words, Umar bent his neck downwards. The man sitting near Rabi told him that he had upset the Leader of the Faithful. To which Umar stated, "By the One who ordained their deaths! I do not wish that these events had not occurred." He further sent an order throughout the Muslim empire that no mourning shall be done in this regard.

Simplicity

The changes that took place in the lifestyle of Umar Bin Abdul Aziz after he became a caliph have been touched upon. He preferred a life of simple living for himself and his family members. The robe that he wore was made of the cheapest cloth and there were patches on his garment. One sheet of cloth would last him for six months. The same would be washed every Friday. Once he was late for the prayer. When somebody asked him, he explained that his only garment was being washed by his servant and there was no other garment to wear.

When he fell ill before his death his brother-in-law Muslima came to inquire about his health. He noticed that the caliph was wearing a dirty torn shirt. Muslima requested his sister, the wife of Umar, to wash the garment. Next day when he arrived he found Umar wearing the same shirt. He asked his sister why she had not listened to him, as it was embarrassing in front of people coming to visit him. She replied that those were the only clothes he had.

Similarly, he chose to eat very simple food. Once one of his servants complained that he was tired of eating the same pulses every day. Fatima replied that his master also ate the same. In fact, after his caliphate, he did not even eat heartily. Umar Bin

Abdul Aziz was very particular about simple food and earning an honest means of livelihood. One instance demonstrates his viewpoint in this regard. His relatives had come for a visit and Umar told the cook not to hurry in the meal. By mid-afternoon time the guests were very hungry so Umar laid out sattu (a drink) and dates for them. When they had had enough of these two things, the servants brought out the food. The guests declined because they were full. Umar told them, "Then why do you eat fire?" (meaning to say that if a simple diet can suffice then why earn money in the wrong way for lavish meals which would ultimately land a person into hell fire).

There was such a paucity of regular household items in his house that an Iraqi woman who had come to ask for stipends for her daughters was amazed. When she expressed her surprise, Umar's wife Fatima answered her, "Trying to fulfill the wants of people like you has made our house a desolate place."

Umar would remain busy in official work spending long hours until late in the night. Then when he had time to lie down on the bed, he would recite the verses of the Quran and he used to become restless. His wife relates that he was once reciting this verse in prayers, "When people will be spread about like moths and the mountains will be like fluffs of wool" he collapsed again and again out of sheer terror. Once she thought that he would die on the spot. Umar had reserved a portion of the house for prayers . He used to spend a large part of the night in prayer and woeful distress.

He was so punctual about the prayer timings that if the Muazzin (one who calls for the prayers) was a little late in calling the azaan, he would send him a message to remind him of the time for prayers. Anas relates that he had never seen someone so closely follow the Prophet (SAW) in his prayers as Umar Bin Abdul Aziz. To emulate Rasool Allah (SAW) in the Sunnah acts of worship he would fast on Mondays and Thursdays.

Love of the Prophet (SAW) and the Prophet's Family

Umar's love for Rasool Allah (SAW) was tremendous. If he found any memento of the Prophet's, he would hold it close to his heart. The Prophet (SAW) had given some land to a companion and he had written an account of it. A person from that family showed the written document to Umar who kissed and held it to his eyes. His attachment for the family of the Prophet (SAW) and his exemplary treatment towards them stemmed from his love for the Prophet (SAW). Before him, Banu Umayya had treated the family of the Prophet very unkindly. But Umar acted in an altogether different manner.

Once a slave appeared before him with a request. He was from the family of slaves who served Banu Hashim and had come with the purpose of asking for an allowance. When he mentioned the name of Ali Bin Abi Talib (RA), Umar's eyes became wet with tears and he stated that he himself was the slave of Ali. He further explained that Rasool Allah (SAW) had said that whoever considered him a master also should take Ali (RA) as a master. Then Umar rewarded the slave handsomely for his association with Ali.

Similarly once many of members from the clan of Banu Umayya were waiting at his door. But when Umar first called in the slave of Abdullah Bin Abbas (RA), his cousin Hisham objected, "After doing so much to our family Umar is still not satisfied. Now he lets a slave of Abdullah Bin Abbas walk all over us."

Umar had deep reverence in his heart for Medina because of his love for the Prophet (SAW). When he left Medina for Syria, he turned back with glistening eyes, and said to his servant Mazahim, "I hope we are not among those people that Medina has spitted out." This referred to the Hadith of the Prophet (SAW) in which he says that Medina is a furnace that churns out all the filth leaving only the pure behind.

Piety was the cornerstone of Umar's existence. The reason Umar is superior among the religious and the pious is the fact that kingship had moved him closer to God whereas it moves most people away from God. We hope that on the Day of Judgment Allah will shelter Umar under His shade in the category of Just Kings. On that fearsome day, there will be no other shade.

Muhammad Bin Ma'abud relates that when he appeared before the King of Rome, he found him sitting on the floor in a state of depression. On being asked the reason for his sorrow he answered that the man of piety had died. On further enquiry he pronounced the name of Umar Bin Abdul Aziz. Then he added, "After Jesus if anyone could revive the dead, it was Umar Bin Abdul Aziz. I am not impressed with the monk who closed his door and left the world, and got busy in his prayers. I am amazed at the man who was offered the world on a pedestal and he rejected it with disdain."

After the death of Umar Bin Abdul Aziz, Yazeed, the son of Abdul Malik Bin Marwan became the caliph. Alas, he undid all the good that Umar had done and reversed the reforms made in the system. Hence Umar's effort to change monarchy into caliphate only lasted until his death. It is said that in the beginning Yazeed tried to follow Umar in his footsteps, but he could not sustain the pressure for more than forty days. He did not possess the courage, strong will and self-restraint needed to withstand all the difficulties.

In the words of Allama Iqbal:

The world never had the rule of love

The reason is that love is no hypocrite

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Naima Sohaib, 40, is the author of *"Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shakhsiat"*, a 500-page book in Urdu about twenty most prominent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author.

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IMAM ABU HANEEFA

Naima Sohaib

Muslim Heroes series No. 4

Translated by Eman Asif Misbah

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

This booklet is fourth in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by my good friend Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. It tells us about these unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam.

This booklet is about an extraordinary Muslim hero from the world of learning. Abu Haneefa was an Islamic scholar and an expert on Islamic law. His juristic pronouncements have held sway over the entire Muslim world for almost twelve centuries. His popularity to this day can be gauged by the fact that no other Muslim scholar has as many biographies written of him as Abu Haneefa. May Allah grant him a place in the highest levels of Jannah, and may Allah give us the ability to learn from his example and dedicate ourselves to the cause of Islam.

Abu Haneefa had unusual mental abilities and acumen, which he put to good use. His biggest achievement is collective and consultative Islamic legislation, which had no parallel at his time and was a futuristic effort to find Shariah solutions to everyday problems ahead of time. Today, we need people like Abu Haneefa to come forward and form an Islamic jurisprudence system in order to meet the needs of the 21st century.

May Allah reward Sana Dossal, Misbah Anwar and Sohaib Umar for editing this piece of work, Nadeem Siddiqui for the design work, and Asif Misbah, my husband for his constant encouragement and support.

Eeman Asif Misbah

Imam Abu Haneefa

Founder of the Hanafi School of Thought and the First to Organize the Science of Fiqh by Active Consultation

Introduction

His name was Noman, his Kuniat Abu Haneefa and his title was Imam-e-Azam.

His family was among the most respectable families of Iran. His grandfather had converted to Islam during the caliphate of Ali (RA) and migrated to Kufa from Iran. In the annals of history, we find an account of his appearance before Ali (RA) and of his asking him to pray for his children. His father Thabit was an established trader. At the age of forty, Allah blessed him with a son who he named as Noman. This same Noman was later known as Abu Haneefa. This was not his real kuniat because he had no son by the name of Haneefa, but he had chosen this kuniat for himself. In the Quran, Islam has been called the Deen-e-Haneef (Religion of the Upright), and hence he kept his kuniat Abu Haneefa.

Birth

According to his grandson Ismaeel, Abu Haneefa was born in 80 Hijri in Kufa.

Background

His grandfather and father were traders by occupation so he followed the family tradition and started manufacturing silk cloth. As he was honest and hard working, he achieved prosperity in his business very soon. So far he had not turned

his attention towards the attainment of knowledge, but during the reign of Caliph Suleman when learning became widespread, Abu Haneefa also became interested in acquiring knowledge. Incidentally an event occurred at this time which strengthened his resolve.

One day Abu Haneefa was going towards the market. He passed by the house of Imam Shoabi, who was a famous scholar in Kufa. He mistook Abu Haneefa to be a young student and asked him where he was headed. Abu Haneefa named a merchant that he was going to visit. Imam Shoabi told him that he saw great potential in him and that he should spend time in the company of learned people. This incident made an impression on Abu Haneefa's mind and he gave a serious thought to the pursuit of education.

Education in Scholarly Discourses

In those days, the educational choices available to students were literature, geneology, history of Arabia, Fiqh, hadith and ilmul kalam (philosophy of religion). In the beginning, Abu Haneefa was inclined towards ilmul kalam. With his sharp mind and original thinking, Abu Haneefa became an expert in it, so much so that even leading masters of ilmul kalam used to avoid debates with him. He states, "In my youth, I recognized philosophy to be the greatest field of learning because I was convinced that the principles of religion were based on these ideas. Later it occurred to me that the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) had always remained aloof from these debates and arguments. They devoted their time to the learning and teaching of Fiqh related matters."

For six years, Abu Haneefa participated in these scholarly speeches, discourses and interactive dialogues. One day a woman asked him the correct method of giving divorce according to the Shariah. Abu Hanifa replied that he did not know the answer, so he sent her to attend the lectures of Imam

Hammad (a famous scholar in Kufa), who was near that place and requested her to stop by on the way back and tell him the answer as well. After she departed, Abu Haneefa felt disturbed and sorry that he could go into the nitty gritty of an argument on even minor issues but he could not give the answer to an ordinary religious query. He stood up immediately and joined the group of students in the discourse of Hammad.

In 102 Hijri when he was 22 years old, he started attending Fiqh lessons given by Imam Hammad. Initially he sat on the left side which was the section reserved for newcomers. But in a few sessions Imam Hammad gauged the keen memory, acumen and intelligence of this new student, so he asked him to sit in the front row in the class.

His Teachers

His first and foremost teacher Hammad was a famous scholar of Fiqh and an Imam in Kufa at that time. He had heard the narration of Ahadith from the Prophet's personal attendant, Anas (RA). Besides that, he had also benefited from the association with many prominent Tab'aeen. His religious school was the largest and the most widely attended in Kufa. Some of the teachers of Hammad had been the students of Abdullah Bin Masood (RA) who was foremost among the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) in his knowledge of Fiqh. During the caliphate of Umar (RA), Abdullah Bin Masood had settled in Kufa.

Some historians claim that Abu Haneefa did not have a profound knowledge of Hadith. This view seems doubtful because both Quran and Hadith are the cornerstones of Fiqh. If a person does not have command over these two sources of Shariah, he cannot become a scholar of Fiqh and give Fatwas (religious decisions). If we take a look at the teachers of Abu Haneefa, we note that they were great scholars of Hadith. Kufa itself was a center of learning for the students of Hadith. There is no doubt that Imam Abu Haneefa gained the knowledge of

Hadith from a number of experts. Let us take a look at some of his teachers who were accomplished in the science of Hadith.

Imam Shoabi: He is the same person who encouraged Abu Haneefa to turn toward religious knowledge. Shoabi had met many Companions and heard Ahadith from them.

Salamah Bin Kuheel: A famous relater of Ahadith. He was also a Taba'ee. Ibn Saad called him "Katheer-ul-hadith". In Kufa he was known for his correct narration of Saheeh Hadith.

Abu Ishaq Sabaee: A noted Taba'ee. He had heard Ahadith from Abdullah Bin Abbas (RA), Ibn Umar (RA), Ibn Zubair (RA), Zaid Bin Arqam (RA) and in addition to these, 28 more Companions of the Prophet (SAW).

Samak Bin Harb: He was a notable scholar of Ahadith, known for his accurate narration of Ahadith. He had met with 80 Companions in his lifetime.

Hisham Bin Urwa: A famous Taba'ee and relater of Ahadith. His students included great scholars of Hadith. Imam Malik was amongst his students.

Qatada: He was a well-known student of Anas Bin Malik (RA). Allah had gifted him with a wonderful memory, so he was also known as "the greatest memorizer among men." His teachers were very impressed with his power of retention.

Shuba: He was a relater of some two thousand Ahadith. He was known to be an expert in this body of knowledge. In Iraq, he was the first person to investigate the levels of veracity of Ahadith.

The last two teachers mentioned above were residents of Basra. This shows that Abu Haneefa also went to Basra to seek knowledge of Hadith. Besides that, he also spent time with scholars at Mecca and Medina. In Mecca, Ataa Bin Abi Rubaa

was his teacher, who was reputed to have met with 200 companions of the Prophet (SAW). From his class emerged great scholars of Islam. Abu Haneefa also gained the knowledge of Hadith from Akramah (the slave and student of Abdullah Bin Abbas). In Medina his teachers were Imam Baqar and his son Imam Jafar Sadiq who imparted profound knowledge in the fields of Fiqh and Hadith.

It is well known that Abu Haneefa performed Hajj 55 times. In those days the students of religion considered Hajj a very important opportunity. Different scholars of Islam from all over the world would meet at one place, and their discourses would continue for months after Hajj. Abu Haneefa benefited greatly from the company of esteemed scholars and also attended the lectures of Imam Malik who was younger to him in age.

In the beginning, when Abu Haneefa would visit the holy cities of Makkah and Medina, he was merely a student. But soon there came a time when the news of his intended visit preceded him, and thousands of people flocked to meet him in every city or village that he passed through.

The point here is that Abu Haneefa spent time in the company of some of the best Islamic scholars in the world who were experts in their field and country. Most of his teachers were Taba'een and expert relaters of Ahadith. How is it possible then to consider Abu Haneefa an ordinary student of Hadith when he had such a superb memory and superior intelligence and had benefited from the teachings of some of the masters of Hadith? However, it is fair to say that his real field of expertise was Fiqh in which he specialized.

Lectures and Rulings

When Abu Haneefa began attending the discourses of Imam Hammad, he soon began to show signs of brilliance. In merely two years he felt confident enough to start a class of his own,

but what held him back was respect and esteem for his accomplished teacher. Incidentally, around that time, a relative of Hammad's expired in Basra, so he urgently left for Basra leaving Abu Haneefa to fill his place.

While lecturing in Hammad's position, several issues came up which had never cropped up during his sessions in Hammad's class. Hence he solved them using his own judgment and wrote down the decisions on a piece of paper. After two months when Hammad came back, he showed him the rulings he had made. Out of 60 cases, Hammad was satisfied with 40 and made changes in about 20 cases. That day Abu Haneefa promised to himself that as long as Hammad was alive, he would remain his student.

In those days, teachers were very highly revered by their students. Although Abu Haneefa had acquired the status of a Mujtahid during the time of Hammad, he never established a school of his own out of love and respect for his teacher.

In 120 Hijri, Hammad breathed his last. His death was a huge loss to the students of Fiqh in Kufa. His son was made his successor but he was more inclined towards literature and semantics. Then Moosa Bin Katheer, the most experienced student of Hammad's, was appointed as the successor. When he left to perform Hajj, he requested Abu Haneefa to take his place who was not convinced that this was the right thing to do. He felt that he was not capable of handling the responsiblilities. At the insistence of people, he started a series of lectures and talks. In the beginning, only the students of Hammad attended these sessions, but soon after, he became so famous in Kufa that the scholars in Kufa also came to benefit from his knowledge. Students of Fiqh came from all over the Islamic world to attend his classes.

Abu Haneefa himself mentions his method of reaching conclusions in these words: "To deduce principles, first I turn to

the book of Allah. If I don't find the pertaining order there, I turn to the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW). If I don't find the command there, I then refer to the rulings of the Companions of the Prophet (SAW). I pick and choose from their sayings what suits the occasion and don't turn anywhere else. But when the ruling comes down to the Taba'een like Ibrahim, Shoabi, Ibn Seeren and Ataa who all did Ijtehad (deductions), then I also do my own Ijtehad just like they did."

Wisdom and Religious Understanding

Abu Haneefa had unusual mental abilities and acumen. His grasp over matters was extraordinary. However complicated the problem, he was able to find a solution in no time. His mind used to work at such an amazing speed that his contemporaries would be surprised. Quite often, people would be pondering over an issue and Abu Haneefa would arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. His students disclosed that he was a quiet person by nature but when a situation was presented before him to comment on, he would burst forth like a gush of water. Very soon, the entire Islamic world became aware of him and people from far and wide came to obtain rulings for their queries. We know through various accounts that he had reserved the period after Fajr or Asr for these kinds of issues.

The method employed by Abu Haneefa was based on common sense. He would explain the matter so well to the supplicant that the issue would be impressed upon his mind. He had command over religious issues as well as worldly dilemmas. Abu Haneefa also used to give advice regarding regular affairs of business and trade. A scholar of Fiqh cannot be good unless he has expertise in both religious aspects and worldly affairs. Plus, he should know how to frame rules as well as enforce them in a society. Because Abu Haneefa satisfied these criteria he came to be known as Imam-e-Azam (The Greatest Scholar). The following examples highlight the incredible intellect that

Abu Haneefa possessed.

Rabee, a courtier of Caliph Mansoor, had a prejudice against Abu Haneefa. Once in the presence of Abu Haneefa he told Caliph Mansoor, "Abu Haneefa opposes the word of your ancestor Abdullah Bin Abbas (RA) and says that if we add the word Inshaallah to an oath, it becomes a part of the oath, but if we say Inshaallah a day later, the oath becomes meaningless." Abu Haneefa instantly retorted, "O Leader of the Believers! Rabee considers his oath of allegiance to you meaningless." When Mansoor asked how, he explained that Rabee assumed that the people who take the oath of loyalty in the court and go home and say Inshaallah render the oath ineffective. Then there is no religious accountability for their actions. Caliph Mansoor started laughing and told Rabee to leave Abu Haneefa alone because he was too smart for him.

One day a crowd of people came up to Abu Haneefa to ask if the people praying behind the Imam should recite the Quran or not. Abu Haneefa replied that it was difficult for him to argue with so many people at the same time; hence the group should select one leader to represent them. When the gathering agreed, he said, "When you agreed to my proposal the argument ended. You all gave one person the power to represent the crowd; similarly, the Imam leading the prayers is enough to represent the followers in recitation." It was not that Abu Haneefa settled a question of Shariah by mere logical reasoning. This method of reasoning was adopted by him for the better understanding of the people; otherwise the basis of his judgment was the Hadith of the Prophet (SAW) in which he declared that the recitation of the Imam is equal to the recitation of the followers.

The Imam had a knack of explaining the most difficult problem in a commonsense manner so that his audience understood it easily. One day, a famous Kharajite leader by the name of Dahhak pointed his sword to the Imam and asked him to repent.

When Abu Haneefa asked what the matter was, he was told to repent for holding the belief that Ali (RA) had agreed to settle his dispute with Amir Muaviya (RA) by arbitration. The Kharajites were extremists who revered Ali (RA). The Imam replied, "If it is your wish to put me to death, I have nothing to say; but if you wish to find out the truth, then permit me to reason with you on this issue. But if we are not able to reach any conclusion what shall we do?" The Kharajite leader proposed that they would select a mediator to decide between them. The Imam stated that this was exactly what Ali (RA) had done. Outwitted, the man left quietly.

Abu Laila, an eminent jurist of Kufa for 33 years had strained relations with Abu Haneefa because the latter would point out mistakes in the former's decisions. The Judge used to hold court in a mosque. Once, on his way home, he came across a woman arguing with a man on the street. As the matter proceeded, she called the man the son of an adulteress. The Judge ordered that she should be arrested, went back to his courtroom and gave her a punishment of two rounds of whipping. When Abu Haneefa found out about this case, he commented, "The Judge has made many errors in his judgment. First, he held court irregularly after calling it a day. Second, he had the punishment executed in the mosque, which was forbidden by the Prophet (SAW). Third, the woman was whipped in a standing position, which is not allowed. Fourth, only one punishment is allowed for one offence, while the Judge ordered two rounds of whipping. Fifth, the two rounds cannot be carried out simultaneously; there has to be an interval for the offender's wounds to heal. Last, there was no case because the man abused had not protested or complained against the woman."

On hearing this list of faults in his judgment, Abu Laila was furious and complained against Abu Haneefa to the governor of Kufa. The governor asked the Imam to stop issuing Fatwas

(religious decrees). Abu Haneefa, obeyed this order without hesitation because the giving of Fatwas is a collective duty, and if some are performing it, the rest need not. He did not restrain himself because he was afraid of disobeying the official. In fact, he was one of the bravest men of his time, and often had the courage to speak out against the government when no one else could (as we shall explain later).

The people of Kufa were by nature not simple. They used to present new problems before Abu Haneefa and get involved in strange circumstances. One day a situation cropped up wherein a man swore that if he performed mandatory bathing (done after intercourse) that day then his wife stood divorced. In a little while he swore again that he would divorce his wife if he missed any of his prayers that day. Then he again swore that his wife stood divorced if he did not have intercourse with her that day. The man was obviously upset with himself for taking these silly oaths. He came to Abu Haneefa for a way out of this dilemma. The Imam had a solution to this impossible situation. He told him to pray Asr, have intercourse with his wife, take mandatory bath after sunset and then pray the Maghrib prayers (remember that the day changes after sunset according to the lunar calendar). In this case, all his conditions were fulfilled and his wife escaped being divorced.

This was an issue concerning Fiqh. People used to approach the Imam with personal matters which had nothing to do with Fiqh. They trusted him in all matters. Abu Haneefa would provide solutions to their problems instead of getting upset at their irrelevant questions like other typical religious scholars.

Once a man appeared before him and revealed that he had forgotten the place where he had kept some money safely. The Imam was surprised at his request and asked how he could help him. When the man insisted, the Imam told him to pray throughout the night. The man had just started praying when he

remembered the hiding place. He came running to Abu Haneefa with the good news. The Imam replied, "The devil does not want that you should spend the whole night in prayer, so he quickly reminded you of the place where you had kept the money. Now you should stay awake this night out of gratitude to Allah and keep praying."

In a similar incident, another man came to Abu Haneefa with the same request. He had buried some treasure in some place in his house but had forgotten where. The Imam went to his house with his students and asked them where they would hide valuables if this were their house. The students all pointed to different places. When these were dug up, one of them contained the valuables.

Compilation of Fiqh

After the death of the Prophet (SAW), the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs saw a lot of territorial expansion and cultural development. It became necessary to have specific laws instead of broad principles present earlier to meet the needs of the swiftly changing Islamic world.

Abu Haneefa was born at a time when the religion of Islam had spread its branches in a large part of the known world. Many revolutions had taken place. Information on Islam was being filtered out to all the conquered areas with fervour. Changes were taking place in the civilized world. The amalgamation of the cultures of the Arab and non-Arab world was creating new issues and new problems. On top of this, the hypocrites and the enemies of Islam were trying to destroy the basic belief system of the Muslims by diverting their attention towards controversial issues. They even indulged in the fabrication of Ahadith. These happenings forced Abu Haneefa to ponder on the situation. He realized the need for a coherent system of Islamic law based on the Quran, the Sunnah and the decisions made by the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) in order to

address human needs at that point in time. Also, even as a student he had believed that Islamic law should be prepared to address future needs. He knew that when the situation arose and an immediate solution was required, it would not be possible to evaluate all aspects of the problem and find clear orders pertaining to it, so there was a chance of going wrong. This kind of law is called Farzi Fiqh (futuristic law).

Till the time of Abu Haneefa, the issues of Fiqh were present only in an oral form and they were not properly organized. They had not been systematized into a regular discipline. Arguments, law differentials, classification of Ahadith and the rules pertaining to Qiyas (reasoning by analogy); these were not organized systematically even in the minds of scholars. There were no methods of reasoning, no rules for the derivation of orders, no grading of traditions and no principles of analogical deduction. In short, Fiqh was just a congruence of uncoordinated rulings that would require extensive work before it could become a system.

Allah had blessed Abu Haneefa with rare originality of mind and thought, and he had an extraordinary flair for legal matters. Being a busy trader by profession, he was acquainted with the legal requirements of the society. He realized that there was a tremendous need for a proper system of jurisprudence. He received hundreds of queries daily from all parts of the Islamic world. Many of the issues were not resolved satisfactorily by the then present judicial system.

In 120 Hijri, when Abu Haneefa occupied the seat of learning, he resolved to organize the details of Fiqh into a system of laws and science. He knew that this was no easy task but he was prepared to undertake such an astronomical venture. Despite his phenomenal expertise in religious verdicts and vast knowledge, Abu Haneefa was not inclined towards imposing his opinions on others or relying entirely on his personal judgment,

so he formed an academy and nominated some eminent scholars from amongst his prize pupils as members. This body not only included experts on Quran, Hadith and Fiqh, but also contained specialists from all fields of life. For example, the experts on Astronomy were included to give their opinions on issues concerning the sighting of the moon in Ramadan. Traders, lexicon experts, weathermen and others were engaged for matters pertaining to their areas of expertise.

The permanent members of this academy were about forty. Some of these were his eminent students like Imam Zufur, Imam Abu Yusuf and Imam Muhammad.

This assembly worked on the principle of free discussion which was also an interesting process. Issues were presented one by one; the opinions, arguments and ideas of the members were heard in detail, then Abu Haneefa himself would inform the people about his opinion and line of reasoning. Sometimes the process of discussion and argument would continue for over a month, until a satisfactory conclusion would emerge. After summing up the matter, Imam Abu Haneefa would conclude it and his opinion was generally so balanced that it would be accepted by all present. If all the members of the board agreed on an issue, the decision was recorded there and then. The members of the academy had complete freedom of speech. They even had the freedom to challenge the Imam without hesitation. The new onlookers would be surprised at the attitude displayed towards the Imam.

Imam Jarjani relates that once a student criticized the Imam openly and told him point-blank that he had erred in his judgment. Jarjani says that he addressed the people present commenting that it was astonishing that they did not defend their Sheikh (teacher). Imam Jarjani had hardly finished this sentence when Abu Haneefa stopped him and informed him that he had permitted his students and those present to adopt a casual

and open style of communication.

It is an established fact that group consultation can only be meaningful if all individuals are allowed to speak their mind, without any pressure. There should be no restriction of undue reverence and formality in order for the formation of laws to be flawless.

For a broader perspective, every issue was not only presented before the body of students and experts of various fields, but also sent to other educational committees in Kufa to be discussed and debated upon so that if they had any authentic Ahadith on the subject they could be presented.

Imam Abu Haneefa compiled judgments on 83,000 to 500,000 issues (according to different traditions). This mammoth project took him a period of no less than 30 years. This was a difficult, gigantic and dangerous task and there was no prior example of this kind of undertaking. Allah's special mercy and blessing made it possible for the Imam to accomplish this huge task. The credit of founding the principles of Fiqh also goes to Abu Haneefa. His compilation of issues on various aspects of Islam and their Fiqhi solutions were brought together so beautifully that this piece of work received great acclaim throughout the Islamic world during his lifetime. As soon as its various parts were completed in succession, they were published throughout the Islamic world.

The Hanafi School of Thought

Like other schools of thought in Islamic jurisprudence, the basis of the Hanafi Fiqh is also the Quran and Sunnah. Like other theologians, Imam Abu Haneefa would give preference to a Sahih Hadith (the most authentic Hadith) over his own opinion or anybody else's. According to him, he never made it a condition that the Hadith should be Mutawatir (heard by innumerable persons) or Mashhoor (well-known), or a single

narrator of hadith should be someone well versed in Fiqh, or that the statement should be based on Qiyas (reasoning by analogy) as well. The Imam very clearly stated that the sayings of the Prophet (SAW) were whole-heartedly acceptable to him unconditionally. He further stated that he did not pass judgments on his own opinions but he passed judgments based on Ahadith. But where there are contradictory Ahadith, then one is preferred over the others based on the authenticity and power of retention of the narrator. But Qiyas can never be preferred over a Hadith. Abu Haneefa himself states, "By Allah! The person who says that we prefer Qiyas to Nas (explicit directive of Quran or Hadith) is a liar and is making an accusation against us. Is Qiyas needed in the presence of a Nas? We never resort to Qiyas except in dire need."

On certain occasions, it seems that Abu Haneefa has preferred a different ruling despite there being a hadith on the subject. The reason for this could be that the compilation of Ahadith had not been done in an organized manner during the time of Abu Haneefa. It is possible that certain Ahadith did not reach him; which is why he adopted a particular stance. Later on, the six main books of Ahadith were accepted as authentic and were looked upon for guidance by the Muslim Ummah. The later scholars felt that on certain occasions, the Hanafi sect did not pay due reverence to a Hadith and assumed a different position.

A special mention deserves to be made of the vastness of the Hanafi school of thought. Unlike the other Fiqhs, it not only focuses on obvious rules and regulations in Islam but also takes into account psychological issues. Here, the definition on Fiqh includes matters related to belief. Besides encompassing matters of worship and everyday issues, it also spreads out into politics and international relations.

The Hanafi School of Thought chalks out Islamic rulings based on rationale, meaning that no order in the Shariah is free from

underlying logic. This is why the Hanafi sect is based on reasoning like no other sect.

The principles of the Hanafi system are based on the premise that the Muslim Ummah should be saved from extremism and inconvenience. Exactness and regularity are the two demands of Shariah as far as Haram (prohibited) and Farz (mandatory) are concerned. Imam Abu Haneefa has put strict limitations in the definitions of Farz and Haram, which reduces their sphere and quantity.

The Hanafi system ensures protection of rights. To the extent that the murder of a Muslim has been equated to the murder of a Zimmi (Non-Muslim living in a Muslim state). In matters of trade, lawsuits, religious traditions, great leverage has been accorded to them.

The Hanafi system encourages individual freedom and freedom of thought. According to Abu Haneefa, a sane adult man or woman can marry without the need of a Wali. Freedom of thought and expression has been declared necessary for the scholars. Accepting gifts or endowments from the ruling caliph is considered disdainful (as it might influence freedom of speech).

Abu Haneefa also accepted good social practices (Maroof) as part of the law. This protected and promoted right attitudes and thoughts. Unlike Imam Malik, Abu Haneefa did not consider the good social practices of Medina only as important enough to be included in the system, but other regions as well.

Dignity of mankind is the cornerstone of the Hanafi Fiqh and decisions were taken on the basis of this principle. For example, the dowry of a free woman cannot be reduced or waived off without an exceptional reason. Similarly, it is considered against human dignity to cut off the hands of a person if he has committed a minor theft.

The Popularity of Hanafi Fiqh

The Hanafi School of Thought achieved a lot of fame in a short period. Caliph Haroon Rashid himself sent his son Mamoon to study it in detail. Later the Abbasid Caliphs chose the Hanafi system for their law departments. The students of Imam Abu Haneefa, Imam Abu Yusuf and Imam Muhammad, played an important role in the spread and the compilation of the Hanafi system. Later on it became the school of thought for the Usmani kingdom.

The countries under the control of the Usmani kingdom – Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Tunis, Albania, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India to this day follow the Hanafi School of Thought. Approximately two-thirds of the Muslim Ummah today follows this system.

Publications and Famous Students

Abu Haneefa left behind him memorable publications, but except for two or three, the rest are not available to us today. His students were noted scholars of Hadith. After the death of Abu Haneefa, they were responsible for the compilation and spread of the system. Imam Abu Yusuf, Imam Muhammad and Imam Zufur are names that need no introduction. Besides these, Yahya Bin Saeed, Abdullah Bin Mubarak, Daud Altai, and Qasim Bin Muan, and a host of other students rendered services from which the Muslim Ummah is benefiting immensely today.

A Man of Principles

Imam Abu Haneefa was not only famous as a religious scholar and as an expert on Fiqh, but in day-to-day affairs and political matters his acumen and integrity were no hidden virtues.

In the last period of Banu Umayya, when the government's

control had weakened over the Islamic empire, the then Caliph Marwan Al Hamar appointed Yazid Bin Umar Bin Habeera as the governor of Kufa. Ibn Habeera was an astute man. To run the matters of government, he decided to seek the help of religious scholars and experts on Fiqh. In this regard, he approached Imam Abu Haneefa for the responsibility of the state treasury. When the Imam openly refused to accept the post, a group of religious scholars approached him and pleaded with him to reconsider his decision. They said, "We plead with you in the name of Allah. Do not make trouble for yourself. We are your brothers in faith. We do not appreciate the responsibility placed on our shoulders by the government but at the moment there seems to be no way out."

Imam Abu Haneefa replied, "This employment is a big matter. If this person required me to count the doors of the mosque in the central city, I would not even do that. How can I fulfill his wishes? If he asks me to behead someone how can I sanction it? By Allah, I cannot make myself a party to this."

Due to Imam's refusal to accept the post, he was sentenced to be whipped. For ten days, he was given ten lashes daily. But Abu Haneefa stuck to his decision till the last. He was reluctantly released from the lock-up due to immense public pressure.

After the rule of the Umayyads came to an end, the Abbasids came to power. People had high expectations from them but soon they came to realize that the Abbasids were no less despotic and cruel than the Umayyad Kings. Caliph Mansoor leashed a new reign of terror and suppressed the Banu Hashim to such an extent that it takes courage to listen to the terrible stories of torture and atrocities. Unable to bear the injustice, Muhammad Nafs Zakia (one of the Banu Hashim's pious and notable people) revolted against the government in Medina. He and his brother Ibrahim were martyred after putting up a brave

fight against the oppressors. The religious scholars were with this group of brave Muslims. Imam Abu Haneefa openly declared his stance on this issue and was on the side of the Banu Hashim. According to some traditions he even helped them out financially. After the death of Ibrahim, the Caliph turned his attention towards those who had supported the revolt. Abu Haneefa was summoned to Baghdad, in order to put him to the test.

After the initial talks, Caliph Mansoor announced his decision to make the Imam the Chief Justice. Abu Haneefa flatly refused the offer and stated, "The law dispensing and justice is a trust of God which has been given to Kings. The best way to fulfill this responsibility is to appoint such a man who has no fear in his heart. You should not trust me. Even if I accepted this post in eagerness, I would like to inform you that if I ever had to decide against you in a court of law, and if I were told to decide in your favour or I would be thrown in river Faraat, I would prefer to be thrown in the river. I would never change the ruling. And if this is my position if I accept in eagerness, you can imagine what my stance would be if I were pressured into accepting this post."

Despite hearing this Caliph Mansoor continued to insist that the Imam accept the post to which he replied, "I am not worthy of this post." Mansoor lost his temper and exhorted, "You are a liar." Abu Haneefa promptly replied, "If I am a liar than this claim of mine is definitely correct that I am not capable of being a judge, because a liar cannot be a judge". Exasperated by his constant refusal, Caliph Mansoor swore that he would not leave him until he accepted the post. The Imam reiterated his stance and swore that he would never accept. The entire court stood amazed at this feat of bravery.

Imprisonment and Death

Caliph Mansoor imprisoned Abu Haneefa in 146 Hijri. Even in

this state, the process of dissemination of education went on. The four-year term in prison proved his sincerity, fearlessness and truthfulness.

In 150 Hijri in the month of Rajab, at the age of 70, his food was poisoned. Feeling the effect of the poison, he slumped down while in the state of prostration and died in the same position. Caliph Mansoor was accused of trying to get rid of the Imam because of his fame and influence. But this allegation was never proven. The news of his death spread quickly to all corners. The whole city came out in mourning. The Chief Justice of the State performed his funeral rites. In the first funeral prayer there were fifty thousand people. After that, the funeral prayer was performed six times. His burial took place at Asr time.

Personality

Imam Abu Haneefa was not just an ordinary Fiqh scholar that passed judgments, but he was equally prominent for his piety. He had been blessed with the best of humane qualities and manners. He had an amazing amount of patience. Many a times, people would talk to him in a rude manner. In spite of his reputation and status, he did not get offended and forgave all who spoke harshly to him.

Once a man asked him about a matter in the Mosque of Kheef. He was not satisfied with the Imam's answer and replied that Hasan Basri had given a contradictory ruling. Abu Haneefa stated that Hasan Basri had committed an error. This man, who was a devout follower of Hasan Basri, got furious and called the Imam the son of a prostitute for insinuating that Hasan could be at fault. The students of the Imam were naturally upset at this outburst and got up to punish the insolent person. Abu Haneefa asked them to stop and there ensued a shocked silence in the audience. When the nerves of the audience calmed down a bit, the Imam spoke in a matter-of-factly voice, "Yes, Hasan has

made a mistake; Abdullah Bin Masood has given the correct reference in this case."

Similarly, once a man started arguing with the Imam in an obnoxious manner. He went to the extent of calling him a Zindeeq (unreligious). Abu Haneefa merely replied that Allah knew that the words used against him were unjustified.

One day the Imam was giving a sermon in the mosque. A person who had some kind of an animosity towards him, started to abuse him. Abu Haneefa remained involved in the talk that he was presenting and also requested his students not to answer the man. The man stubbornly refused to go away and carried on with his tirade. After the lecture was over, he started walking with the Imam and kept on insulting him. When Abu Haneefa reached his home, he requested the man to finish what he had to say as he would not get a chance to complete his words once the Imam entered his house.

Such incidents are recorded in various books which point towards his soft, humble and patient attitude.

Abu Haneefa himself declares that he never cursed anyone, never took revenge from anybody, never bothered any Muslim or Non-Muslim, never committed fraud or broke a promise. He had no interest in establishing his importance or achieving personal fame and glory.

The mother of Abu Haneefa was under the influence of a scholar named Amr Bin Zarqa. Whenever she was doubtful about a religious matter, she used to send her son (Imam Abu Haneefa) to Zarqa's house for a solution. Amr Bin Zarqa would be embarrassed at this but Abu Haneefa requested him for an answer as that was his mother's order. If on certain occasions, Zarqa was at a loss for an answer, he would ask the Imam and then just repeat his words. Sometimes, the Imam would accompany his mother on a donkey and walk alongside. She

would be satisfied when she heard the answer personally from her mentor.

Imam Abu Haneefa was a man of few words. He would be quiet most of the time and would spend his time in deep contemplation. He stayed away from matters that did not concern him. He would avoid backbiting, and when he spoke about people, he used words of praise. Sufyan Soori was told that Abu Haneefa had never been heard defaming any soul. He answered that the Imam was no fool to waste his good deeds (since backbiting takes away one's good deeds). He would avoid taking oaths. He had made a mental note that if he ever swore by mistake, he would pay a penalty of one dirham.

After his religious sermons were over, the students would freely argue and discuss matters. The Imam would quietly listen to their opinions. When a dispute would become heated, and no conclusion seemed imminent, the Imam would step in to deliver the final verdict that used to satisfy the inquiring minds.

Abu Haneefa had a thriving trade. He was an extremely charitable and generous man. When he would make clothes for his children, he would donate a similar amount to the poor. He would clothe the scholars in the same kind of clothes that he wore himself. He gave generously to the students who were needy.

The Imam had reserved part of his business profits for the religious scholars and Hadith experts, the income of which would reach them each month. He desired that knowledge seekers in Islam should be free of monetary tension. In this way, they would be able to focus their full energy and talents towards learning.

Once while on the road, the Imam passed a man who had taken a loan from him some time back. The man was avoiding the Imam because he had not been able to pay back the loan. Abu

Haneefa stopped him and asked him the reason for his strange behaviour. On knowing the reason, he was amazed at the man's sense of shame, and immediately forgave him the amount.

Likewise, on the way to Hajj once, two men were quarrelling with each other. When Abu Haneefa inquired about the cause, he found out that one owed the other a small amount of money, the lender was demanding his money back and the borrower was refusing to pay back. Abu Haneefa expressed his astonishment at this and said that there was little regard left in this world if people fought over such petty matters. Then he proceeded to pay the amount to the lender himself to settle the dispute.

It would be worthwhile to mention the Imam's integrity and honesty in matters of trade. Owing to a successful trading business, he regularly dealt with big businessmen. Abu Haneefa was so cautious in his dealings that he never resorted to any unfair means and trained his employees to do the same. Once he sent a few rolls of cloth to his agent informing him of the defective quality of the cloth. He further instructed that he should inform the buyer of the defect before selling it. The agent forgot the instruction given to him and sold the cloth without revealing the defective condition. When the Imam found out that the material had been sold without knowledge of the defect, he donated the entire amount of that day's sale to the poor.

Abu Haneefa was careful not to extract any money unjustly; he would be conscious of the rights of the seller while buying as well. Once while purchasing some material the seller quoted the price as a mere 1,000 dirhams out of respect and admiration for the Imam. The Imam told him that the worth of the cloth was much more than 1,000 dirhams. Then he himself calculated the value of the cloth and paid 8,000 dirhams for it.

This caution was not only exercised in monetary matters but

Abu Haneefa also exhibited restraint in matters of state. Once, the governor forbade Abu Haneefa from expressing religious opinions (fatwas). Coincidentally, during this period, Abu Haneefa's dear daughter came to him with a query. She wanted to know if her fast was valid because she had swallowed some blood oozing from her gums. Her father advised her to go to her brother Hammad for the answer, as he had been forbidden from passing verdicts. A few days later, when the governor himself faced difficulty in some religious issue, he requested the Imam to present his views. Thus the restriction was removed automatically.

Despite his scholarly activities and involvement in business affairs, Imam Abu Haneefa devoted a lot of time to worship. He would spend hours in the night staying awake and weeping over the verses of the Quran. Many a times, his body would shiver at the mention of the punishment in the Hereafter. He would repeat the same verses over and over again till break of dawn. A contemporary of the Imam states, "Once I was present with the Imam in the Isha prayers, during which the verses of Surah Zilzal were recited. After prayers, people dispersed to go home. I observed that Abu Haneefa was heaving sighs of regret. I went home not wanting to intrude on his time. When I came to the mosque again in the morning I saw that he was still there. He would run his hands over his beard and plead with Allah, the Reckoner of the smallest good and bad deeds, to spare him from the fire."

His intense fear of Allah, his piety and worship, caution in treating Allah's creation, his sympathy and extension of all help, and the dedication of his life to Allah's religion were not enough reasons for him to feel content and he did not think that he had achieved enough. On the contrary, his heart constantly quivered with the fear of Allah.

Once while in the market, the Imam accidentally stepped on the

toes of a boy. The lad screamed and asked, "Do you not fear Allah?" At this, the Imam fell unconscious. When he came to his senses, he was asked why he reacted so strongly to a minor comment by a boy. He replied that it could have been a divine warning.

The life of Abu Haneefa is exemplary for ordinary people as well as for scholars. The role of religious scholars is to guide people to the straight path. They are not the guardians of Hell and Heaven and have no authority to pass judgments about who will enter what station in the Hereafter. They should themselves be careful about following what they preach, as the Quran says, "Do you enjoin piety and righteousness on other people, while you forget to practice it yourselves?" (44: 2).

The Contribution of Abu Haneefa and Islamic Legislation in Present Times

In the end, it is important to recapture the significant contribution of Imam Abu Haneefa in the field of Islamic legislation. It is the need of the entire Muslim Ummah that legislation should keep up with changes in culture, civilization and technology. After the death of the Prophet (SAW), the Four Righteous Caliphs, in particular Abu Bakr (RA) and Umar (RA) organized a consultative council to decide religious matters and to make laws. Umar would consult his eminent companions in all matters; political, social, economic and legislative. He would often accept the counsel of intelligent and pious men. Many a times, he also changed his opinion in favour of another's point of view.

Among the notable Taba'een, a group of seven scholars took over the task of legislation in Islamic matters. Even the Chief Judge in Medina used to consult this group when making important decisions and took actions accordingly. When Umar Bin Abdul Aziz (the fifth rightly guided caliph) was the

governor of Medina, he took full advantage of this forum. The seven scholars included Abu Bakr Bin Haris, Haris Bin Zaid, Qasim Bin Mohammad, Saeed Bin Musayyab, Abdullah Bin Utbah, Salim Bin Abdullah and Suleman Bin Yasar. After the first few glorious centuries of Islamic rule, Ijtehad (reasoning by scholars on current issues) came to a virtual end for a long period. The entire Muslim Ummah came to rely only on the work done by the four Imams centuries ago. There were a few individual efforts at Ijtehad, but they were few and far between and could not satisfy the demands of changing times and technology in a comprehensive manner. A notable effort in this regard was made by Aurangzeb Alamgir, the last of the powerful Mughal rulers. In 11th Hijri, Aurangzeb formed a committee of religious experts under the supervision of Sheikh Nizam. The purpose was to compile a comprehensive book which covered all the issues of Fiqh; a book that would be acceptable to the religious scholars. The book came to be known as Fatawi Alamgiri. It was accepted at the government level, but never became part of the constitution of the state. It was a good effort as it contains various opinions of religious scholars on different Fiqh issues.

On a state level, we find another example in the Usmani period of rule. In 1293 Hijri, a thick document containing different laws was compiled by a seven member team of religious experts under the supervision of the judiciary. This effort took nine years to complete.

Islamic legislation does not have a great success history because it did not get the attention it deserved. According to the author, the reason for this was the lack of co-ordination and trust between the religious scholars and the rulers. It has been seen that kings and monarchs try to use pressure tactics to get religious scholars under their influence. Religion has been used as a tool to forward the interests of the ruling party. Traditionally, the righteous scholars moved in the backlines and

the pseudo religious scholars were not accepted by the masses. Hence there was no measurable stride in the field of Islamic lawmaking at the official level.

The need of the hour is to establish a reliable institution which should comprise of prominent religious scholars who enjoy the support of all the major schools of thought. The institution should not merely send recommendations to the parliament (like the Islamic Ideology Council) but these must be acted upon for change to take place. In addition to this, the body should address the modern problems faced by the society and should inform the masses of their opinions on different issues. This would help in guiding the Ummah in better decision-making. For example, the issues faced by our society today are the influence of TV and media, the presence of images and pictures everywhere, and the presence of women in every field. A lot of questions crop up in the minds of people regarding these topics. Also, the questions of Jihad, the definition of terrorism according to Islam, Shariah's view on suicidal attacks, etc have been addressed by some individual scholars but the Ummah continues to wait for a coherent collective opinion from acclaimed Islamic scholars in this regard.

May Allah shower His mercy on Imam Abu Haneefa that he thought seriously about the changing needs of the society due to growth in civilization and addressed the ensuing problems. He adopted a consultative strategy to solve these issues. Abu Haneefa did not care to accept any posts in the government for fear of losing the authority to speak out the truth. However, he did not stop his students from accepting positions in the establishment on the condition that they should have the right to decide without fear or favour. He did not consider it right to change decisions on the basis of the pressure of the ruling regime. He instructed Abu Yusuf, a well-acclaimed student of his, in these words, "If the King wishes to appoint you to a position in the field of justice, first find out if he is comfortable

with your way of deduction and decision-making. It should not be the case that you are pressured into acting against your independent opinion. If you feel that you are not capable of a post, never accept it."

In the end, he wrote, "If the King himself commits a sin, tell him that although you are under his command, yet you are bound to inform him of his mistake. If he does not agree, then explain to him in private that his deed is against the Quran and Sunnah. If he understands, then it is fine, and if he doesn't, then pray to Allah to save you from the King's vengeance."

Today the world sees a lot of Hanafi adherents and Imam Abu Haneefa has a large following in the Muslim world. There are many who try to prove the superiority of Abu Haneefa over the other Imams. But it is sorrowful that no one is willing to take on the task that he did, in the same way that he did. It is hoped that in the future Islamic scholars in general and Hanafi scholars in particular will pay attention to Islamic legislation in a consultative and collective manner which is the need of modern times.

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IMAM MALIK

Naima Sohaib

Muslim Heroes series No. 5

Translated by Eman Asif Misbah

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

This booklet is fifth in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by my good friend Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. It tells us about these unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam.

This booklet is about an extraordinary Muslim hero from the world of learning. Imam Malik Bin Anas was known as the scholar of Madina. He started teaching in the Prophet's (SAW) mosque at a very early age. Since our hero lived upto the ripe old age of ninety, he witnessed the change from the Umayyad dynasty to the Abbasid one. Most of the caliphs he encountered had a deep love of learning and he commanded their respect. Yet he never humbled himself before them and expected them to behave as ordinary students when they came to listen to his sermons.

Malik Bin Anas is specially recognized for his voluminous book Al-Mautah. Chronologically, this is supposed to be the second most authentic Islamic book written after the Quran. Today, the Maliki School of Thought continues to guide millions of Muslims.

May Allah reward Sana Dossal, Misbah Anwar and Sohaib Umar for editing this piece of work, Nadeem Siddiqui for the design work, and Asif Misbah, my husband for his constant encouragement and support.

Eeman Asif Misbah

Imam Malik

The Founder of the Maliki School of Thought and the Most Notable Scholar in Madina in Second Hijri

Introduction

His name was Malik, his Kuniat Abu Abdullah, and his title Imam Darul-Hijrah (the Imam of Madina).

Birth

Imam Malik was born in 93 Hijri in Madina.

Family Background

Imam Malik belonged to a family of scholars. His great-grandfather Abu Amir reverted to Islam in the era of the Prophet (SAW). There are some traditions that point out that he was a Companion of the Prophet (SAW). Abu Amir was the first one in his family to take up residence in Madina. Imam Malik's grandfather Malik was a notable Taba'ee. He was closely affiliated with Usman (RA), to the extent that he was involved in the dangerous task of the burial of Usman (RA) after he was martyred. Malik (the grandfather) was also a student of Talha (RA), Aqueel Bin Abi Talib (RA), Abu Huraira (RA) and Ayesha (RA). He also taught the science of Ahadith to Suleman Bin Yasaar who was among the seven great mujtahideen in Madina.

Imam Malik's uncle Abu Suhail Nafay was also an expert of Hadith. His students Imam Zehri and Imam Ismael rose to a position of prominence in the field of Hadith.

Educational Activities in the City of Madina

Before touching upon the educational achievements of Imam Malik it would be important to discuss the educational culture prevailing in Madina at that time. After the death of the Prophet (SAW), many of his Companions left Madina for other places. Despite this Madina remained the centre of religious learning. Ayesha (RA), Abdullah Bin Umar (RA), Abu Huraira (RA), Abdullah Bin Abbas (RA) and Zaid Bin Thabit (RA) were the main personalities engaged in disseminating and propagating Islamic education. Later, the dedicated efforts of their students continued the tradition. Madina became the hub of religious education for the entire Islamic empire.

Prominent among Ayesha's (RA) students were her nephews Qasim Bin Mohammad Bin Abi Bakr and Urwa Bin Zubair. Among Abdullah Bin Umar's (RA) students Nafay and Abdullah Bin Dinar achieved eminence. Kharija Bin Zaid learnt from his father Zaid Bin Thabit (RA). Saeed Bin Musayyeb gained knowledge from Abdullah Bin Abbas (RA) and Abu Huraira (RA). Besides these other well-known scholars were Imam Zehri, Imam Jafar Sadiq and Rabia Rai.

During the time of Umar Bin Abdul Aziz, the congregation of the Fiqha-e-Sabaa (The Seven Great Scholars) was considered to be the single most important legislative body of that era. Even the Supreme Court in the country took advantage of this council. In this assembly, the rulings given by the Companions came under discussion and other important issues of that time were also touched upon. Many a times, cases of law were also taken up by this Council.

Education and Upbringing

It is not difficult to imagine what kind of religious environment Imam Malik grew up in, considering his family background and the educational and spiritual atmosphere present in Madina. In

those days the curriculum was simple and subjects were few. The main fields were Quran, Hadith and Fiqh. Imam Malik also tried to master these subjects. He learnt the recitation of the Quran and was certified by Imam ul Qura Abu Dareem Nafay. He was an expert in his field and his methodology of recitation is the basis for all Qirat (recitation) practiced in the Islamic world today.

Imam Malik also began to formally study the science of Hadith in his childhood. His first teacher of Hadith was Nafay who served Abdullah Bin Umar (RA) for 30 years. During this period Nafay collected the pearls of knowledge from his master and spent the rest of his life spreading this valuable knowledge. Many famous scholars of Hadith were his students. Imam Malik was also one of them. The Imam states, "When I used to go to Nafay, I was a mere lad. A slave would accompany me. When Nafay would step out of his house, he would relate Ahadith to me."

Imam Malik had so much faith in the knowledge of his teacher that he says that when he used to hear the Ahadith of Ibn Umar (RA) from Nafay's tongue, he did not seek to verify it through any other source.

Later on the traditions that Imam Malik heard from Nafay and that Nafay had heard from Ibn Umar came to be known as "Talai Zanjeer" (the golden chain).

Imam Malik also acquired education from Mohammad Bin Shahab Az-Zahri. He was a well-known scholar of Hadith. Many of the Ahadith related by him are included in the Seven Great Books of Ahadith. After Abu Bakr Hazm, he was the second compiler of Ahadith in history. The critics of Ahadith consider Imam Zahri to be the most reliable in terms of content and credibility. This vast ocean of knowledge was transferred to Imam Malik from Imam Zahri. Imam Malik is deemed to be second to none out of all of Zahri's students.

To attain the knowledge of Ahadith Imam Malik also learned under the tutelage of Imam Jafar Sadiq, Mohammad Bin Al-Munkadir, Mohammad Bin Yahya, Abu Hazim and Abu Saeed Yahya. If we glance at the list of Imam Malik's teachers, we find no less than 93 names of eminent scholars.

Imam Malik was instructed in the science of Fiqh by Ar-Rabiah who was so highly esteemed in the field if Ijtehad (religious analogy) that he was given the title of "Rai" (one who gives an opinion). Rabiah was specifically appointed in the Mosque of the Prophet (SAW). He had a long list of brilliant students but he had a special bonding with Imam Malik. So much so that in the science of Asma-ur-Rijaal he has been called Sheikh-e-Malik. (Asma-ur-Rijaal is an extraordinary discipline that Muslims created to check the credibility of the compilers of Ahadith. Sheikh-e-Malik means the teacher of Malik).

This is the same Rabiah whose mother is mentioned in various books of Islamic learning. The story goes like this: Before Rabiah's birth, his father left for jihad to fight in the war of Khurasan. He left an amount of 30,000 dinars with his wife. When he returned after 27 years, his son had matured into a remarkable young man who was a lecturer at the Mosque of the Prophet (SAW). When his father beheld this glorious sight, he was filled with joy. After some time, when he questioned his wife about the money that he had left behind, she asked if money was dearer to him or the glory of his son. He replied that the status of his son was much more important. The wife stated, "Exactly! It all went in the education and upbringing of your son."

Imam Malik was very selective in his choice of teachers. He chose only those educators who were well known for their character and honesty, and who had extraordinary mental acumen. Imam Malik himself states, "There were scores of teachers in Madina, to whom people would flock to learn

Ahadith. But I never went to them to seek knowledge. Of them, some did not possess the depth of knowledge and some were generally ignorant." This caution exercised by Imam Malik was beneficial to his students. Before accepting any tradition from a scholar they would check if the Imam had included his name in his books. If they found his name in the writings of their teacher, they accepted it, otherwise they would reject it.

Imam Malik did not travel to different places for the attainment of knowledge. One reason is that Madina itself was the centre of Islamic education. Another reason was that most of the great scholars existing at that time would visit Madina from time to time, especially during the Hajj season. During these visits, they would share their vast knowledge with others. When we take a look at the list of Imam Malik's teachers, we find some names that were not residents of Madina. This shows that he must have benefited from their company while they were in Madina.

Imam Malik possessed an unusually good memory. He says about himself, "Once something enters my mind it does not slip out." This does not mean that it was easy for the Imam to accomplish what he did in the field of Islamic learning. He narrates, "Nafay would teach in the afternoons. I would leave for Baqi where Nafay resided in the scorching heat of the day without any shade." He mentions another teacher, Sheikh Ibne Hermuz, "I would visit him in the morning and come back at night." We can see what hardships he undertook for the attainment of his objective. His sincerity towards learning and the hard struggle for its achievement made him an accomplished scholar in a short time, much to the envy of his contemporaries.

Start of Religious Lectures

At a young age, Imam Malik was firmly established as a prominent teacher of Hadith and Fiqh. Shoaba, the greatest

scholar of Hadith in Kufa, says about him, “A year after the death of Nafay when I came to Madina I found Imam Malik heading a substantial circle of students.” At this time, Imam Malik was probably 24 years old. Before conducting a regular session, he took the approval of 70 esteemed scholars of Madina regarding his capability for religious decrees. Then only did he agree to assume this position. His teacher Rabiah Rai was still alive when he became known as an expert of Hadith and Fiqh. After the death of Rabiah in 136 Hijri, Imam Malik became the Imam of Fiqh and Ijtehad (Religious Analogy).

The atmosphere in Imam Malik’s class was very formal and the setting was grand. Expensive carpets were laid out, perfume was sprayed and the floor was impeccably cleaned. Imam Malik would be seated in the centre of the class, on a high seat where the second caliph Umar Bin Khattab (RA) used to sit. Then the recitation of the Ahadith would start.

There was pin-drop silence in the gathering. Imam Shaafai says, “We would be scared to turn the pages of our books in case there was a rustling sound.” Despite the presence of so many students, scholars, elite and tourists, there was commendable silence in the audience. There was no noise or commotion, nobody even dared to speak in a loud voice.

Imam Malik commanded so much respect and awe that during his lectures students were careful not to move in their positions. A poet comments on this state, “If the Imam would stop giving answers, the audience would sit with their heads down and no one would dare ask the question again. He was held in such high esteem that he could be called the King of Piety stationed at his seat of honour. It is strange that people would be awed by him although he was not a king.”

Present among the listeners were both rich and poor, elite and ordinary laymen, and there was no distinction among them. However, Imam Malik did seat the capable and voracious

learners nearer to him. Before the teaching session would start, he would call out for the serious and dedicated students to come and sit in the front of the class.

His teaching method was such that he would listen while the students would recite one by one. When needed he would intercede to correct the mistake. In the Hadith terminology, this method is called "Qurat-ul Talmeez Ala Sheikh". Another method that was prevalent was called Qurat-ul-Sheikh alal-Talmeez" in which the Sheikh recited and the students corrected their own mistakes. The mode employed by Imam Malik was safer and better. The Instructor would not repeat the Ahadith again but would make the student read out what he had written. This way, he would correct any errors made by the student. Also, it would become clear to all the students the distinction between the actual words of the Hadith and the commentary by the teacher. In the other method, the words of the Hadith and those of the Sheikh were liable to get mixed up. In Imam Malik's class the dictation of Ahadith was done slowly and with reverence. First he would finish a Hadith completely and then start the next one.

Reverence for Ahadith and Love for the Prophet (SAW)

It has been generally seen that scholars who are involved day and night with the teaching of the Quran and Hadith generally are not as careful or respectful as they should be towards these sources of divine guidance. Imam Malik was a different case altogether. He was so reverent towards the being of the Prophet (SAW) and the words uttered by him, that this attitude deserves a special mention.

Before commencing the teaching session of Ahadith, Imam Malik would take a purification bath, apply perfume and don beautiful garments. Then after commencing his lecture, he would not change his position in reverence for the words of the Prophet (SAW). According to Musab Bin Abdullah, "When

Imam Malik would mention the Prophet (SAW), the colour of his face would change and his head would bend down in respect."

An incident in this regard has been cited by his student Abdullah Bin Mubarak, "One day when Malik was relating some Ahadith, a scorpion bit him and must have bitten him about ten times. The Imam's face acquired an uneasy contour because of the pain but he did not stop the flow of his words. When the session ended and the class had dispersed, I asked him the cause of his discomfort. He communicated the reason for his uneasiness and said that in normal circumstances he would not have sat so patiently but because he was relating Ahadith of the Prophet (SAW), he dared not discontinue the lecture."

This extreme respect was reserved only for the Ahadith sessions. When he held Fiqh classes, he would come to the podium in whatever state he was in.

Imam Malik spent his entire life in the city of Madina but the awe and reverence of Majid-e-Nabvi was embedded deep in his heart. He used to step outside the precincts of the haram to relieve him. Throughout his life he refused to ride an animal in Madina because the Prophet (SAW) lay in that city. Even when he became old and weak he refused a mount because he felt ashamed to ride any animal that would scrape the mud of the earth where the Prophet (SAW) lay.

If any student or scholar would raise his voice during a Hadith session, Imam Malik would ask him to lower his voice. Because Allah commands us in the Quran, "O you who believe! Do not raise your voice above the voice of the Prophet (SAW)." Imam Malik was of the opinion that raising one's voice during the Ahadith class was like amplifying your voice above that of the Prophet's. Once he even warned Caliph Mansoor when he spoke in a loud tone.

Imam Malik had a special fondness for the Mosque of the Prophet (SAW). Once Caliph Haroon decided to restore the steps leading to the pulpit of the Prophet (SAW) to its original state. The pulpit originally had three steps but later additional steps had been added. The Caliph wanted to decrease them to the earlier number. When the Imam found out the intention of the Caliph, he asked him to reconsider because the steps of the pulpit were old and the wood had become weak. A slight rearrangement could easily cause cracks in the wood. The idea was to preserve this remembrance of the Prophet (SAW). Caliph Haroon accordingly refrained from making any changes.

In his later years, Imam Malik chose to stay in Madina, and did not venture out for fear of dying outside the city of the Prophet (SAW). He wanted to die and be buried in Madina. Whenever an opportunity or request would come inviting him out of the city, he would refuse. Once Caliph Mehdi sent him an invitation to go to Baghdad with him. He also sent 2000 gold coins to Imam Malik. When the Imam refused, the Caliph again sent a request through a messenger. The Imam delivered the hadith to him that said, "Madina is better for them." He told the messenger that he could take away the bag of money but stepping out of Madina was impossible for him.

Imam Malik was passionately in love with the persona of the Prophet (SAW), his sayings and anything related to him. We know from traditions that Imam Malik had the good fortune of seeing the Prophet (SAW) in his dreams several times.

Political Conditions

Besides being a notable scholar, Imam Malik was a man with insight and strong principles. It seemed as if Allah had ensured that only truth would emerge from his tongue and made his heart the vanguard of truth. Many occasions arose in his life when the Imam cared not for his life or honour; he only stood to defend the truth. Before highlighting his historic role, it would

be pertinent to look at the political background present at that time.

After the death of Ali, the fourth rightly guided caliph, the leadership of the Muslim Ummah passed into the hands of Banu Umayya. The Hashemite clan, which included the offspring of Ali (RA) and Fatima (RA), and that of the Prophet's uncle Abbas (RA), could not bring themselves to accept their rule. They secretly tried to re-establish the power of the Hashemites. They would nominate an Imam among themselves for the attainment of their political and religious goals. Initially the Imams were chosen from the Alvi family (descendents of Ali), who were loyal to their cause till the end of their lifetime, and would then nominate another Alvi before their death. Later on, when Abu Hisham died in Syria, there was no other Hashemite present but Mohammad – the great grandson of Abbas (RA). Hence he nominated Mohammad before he died.

This was the first time that the secret caliphate passed from an Alvi to the family of Abbas. After Mohammad, his son Ibrahim became the Imam and then leadership passed on to Abul Abbas Saffah. In 132 Hijri, Saffah succeeded in seizing the caliphate from Banu Umayya. Marwan, the Caliph of Banu Umayya, accepted defeat and ran away. He was ultimately killed. After the death of Marwan and the seizure of the caliphate, Banu Hashim were still not satisfied and the fire of revenge burned in their hearts. They unleashed a reign of terror in the Muslim Ummah in order to erase the memory of Banu Umayya; to the extent that they dug out the graves of the Umayyad rulers. After becoming the Caliph, Abul Abbas Saffah decided that the right of the caliphate would be retained solely for the Abbasid clan among the Hashemites.

On one hand Banu Abbas left no stone unturned for the elimination of the Banu Umayyad clan. On the other hand, the descendants of Fatima and Ali (RA) were extremely upset at the

decision of sole concentration of power in the hands of Banu Abbas. They believed that the caliphate was the right of all the Banu Hashim and not exclusively the offspring of Abbas (RA). Abul Abbas Saffah spent four years of his life battling these civil wars and internal skirmishes. The main player behind this movement, Abu Muslim Khurasani, was a Muslim with Persian background. He was extremely conniving and a genius at creating mischief among various parties. He had gained confidence among the Abbasids because of his extraordinary performance and dedicated services. He was able to generate feuds and warfare among the different Arab tribes because in his heart, he had a profound hatred for the Arabs. The strength of the Muslim Caliphate crumbled and their powerful empire disintegrated into hostile factions.

Selflessness and Modesty

After the death of Abul Abbas Saffah his brother Abu Jafar Mansoor became the Caliph of the Muslim Ummah. In 140 Hijri he visited the holy cities of Makkah and Madina in the course of performing the Hajj. Mansoor was a devoted follower and supporter of Imam Malik. Before the revolution that brought his family to power, he was a student of Imam Malik and used to attend the study circles initiated by the Imam. He recognized the worth of his teacher. In a gathering of scholars, he addressed Imam Malik, "O Abu Abdullah! I am fed up with the differences in Fiqh among scholars. Iraq has nothing to offer. Syria just has a passion for Jihad, there is no real knowledge there. Whatever value is left is here in Hijaz and you are the leader of the scholars in Hijaz. I would like to imprint your book Mautah on the covers of the holy house in Makkah so that people converge towards it. Also I would like to send copies of the book to all corners of the Muslim empire so that scholars consult it and pass religious judgments accordingly."

Imam Malik replied, “The Companions of the Prophet (SAW) had spread throughout the Islamic world. Their students and scholars in each city have inherited their rulings and judgments. These rulings are popular in their areas. In such a scenario, it would be unwise and impractical to force the opinion of one person upon them especially when there exists the possibility of errors in the rulings.”

Mansoor stated that if Imam Malik had given him the permission, he would have done just that.

We should make a comparison between the humble attitude of Imam Malik and that of our current scholars as well as general public who make every effort to promote their school of thought and beseechingly appeal to the ruling class to promote their viewpoint. They even resort to schemes and unfair practices to achieve their ambitions.

Mansoor had the highest degree of respect for Imam Malik. We can gauge his emotional attachment by his comments to a courtier. Once Sufyan Soori, a noted scholar, went to the court of Caliph Mansoor and admonished him by using very harsh words. An astonished courtier asked Mansoor why he did not give orders for Sufyan’s execution. Caliph Mansoor asked him to shut up and replied, “There is no one else capable of respect but Sufyan Soori and Malik bin Anas.”

Imam Malik – A Man of Principles

The recognition given to Imam Malik by Caliph Mansoor could have inclined the Imam towards the Caliph. But Imam Malik was destined to speak and adhere to the truth. Nothing could come between him and the truth; not the injustices and cruelties imposed on him nor the generous gifts of money sent to him.

When Caliph Mansoor detected the unwillingness of Fatimi and Alvi families to accept the restricting of the government in the

hands of Banu Abbas, he was furious and meted out harsh treatment against the rebels. When the oppression of the ruling class became unbearable, a man called Nafs Zakia from among the descendants of the Prophet (SAW) left Madina with a group of protesters in order to fight the Caliph. Imam Malik gave the ruling that the Caliphate was the right of Nafs Zakia. People objected that they had already taken the oath to serve the existing Caliph. The Imam replied that Caliph Mansoor had forcefully obtained the oath of allegiance from the masses. Any deed that is done by force had no validity in Shariah. He said the even if a divorce is obtained by force it has no legal effect.

Many people in Madina supported Nafs Zakia in his fight for the Caliphate, but he did not achieve success and was martyred in the battlefield fighting bravely till the end. His brother Ibrahim also came forward to assist him but he was also killed.

Caliph Mansoor appointed his cousin Jafar as the governor of Madina. Jafar took a new oath of allegiance from the people of Madina. He sent a message to Imam Malik to refrain from passing judgment against forced divorce, since people would draw the analogy between this and forcefully obtained vote of confidence. Imam Malik was obviously the last person to desist from his stance. Hence he was sentenced to be whipped 70 times.

The Imam was brought out like a criminal. His shirt was taken off and he was given seventy lashes. Blood oozed from his back. In this state, he was paraded through the streets of Madina on a camel. Imam Malik, weak and bleeding, was subjected to this inhuman torture but his tongue was busy in proclaiming the truth. Passing through the lanes of Madina, he kept saying, "Whoever knows me knows me, whoever doesn't should know that I am Malik Bin Anas and I give the verdict that divorce under compulsion is invalid."

Then he went to the Prophet's Mosque, cleaned the blood from

his wounds, took a bath and performed two rakats of prayers. Later he said, “When Saeed Bin Musayyeb was whipped he also came to Masjid-e-Nabvi and offered two rakats of prayer.” (Saeed was a noted Taba’ee).

Later when Caliph Mansoor found out about this episode, he was very sorrowful. He offered his apology and lodged a case against his cousin, the governor of Madina. This incident did not turn the people against Imam Malik, in fact, they became even more inclined towards him. His name became included among those who pronounced and defended the truth come what may.

Caliph Mansoor once came to know that religious scholars under his rule were not too happy with him. Late in the night he sent for all the scholars. Imam Malik performed an ablution and then applied a balm over his body before appearing in court. Caliph Mansoor addressed the scholars, “O knowledgeable ones! You are obligated to be obedient to me, but you say foul things about me behind my back. If I had made a mistake, then it was only proper that you should have counseled me.” Then he turned towards Imam Malik and asked, “What do you think of me?” The Imam replied, “For Allah’s sake, absolve me from replying to this question.” His silence on this issue gave away his true opinion. The Caliph repeated the same question to the other scholars. When one by one they all left, he turned back to Imam Malik and asked him why he smelled of the balm that was applied to dead bodies.

Imam Malik replied that he had thought this was the end of his life when he had been summoned in the middle of the night. The Caliph was stunned. He exclaimed, “Glory be to Allah! O Abu Abdullah! Do you expect that I would myself destroy a pillar of Islam?”

After the death of Caliph Mansoor, Mehdi, Haadi and then Haroon Rashid became the respective rulers. They would attend

the sermons of Imam Malik and sit in his class. But as opposed to tradition, Imam Malik did not stoop to kissing their hands and no one had the nerve to ask him do so.

Caution Exercised in Rulings

A scholar of Fiqh is certainly a level above a scholar of Hadith. A Hadith expert is only an authority on the sayings of the Prophet (SAW), but a Fiqh expert in addition to his knowledge of Ahadith has command over analogical reasoning of the legal systems. For a scholar of Fiqh to be effective, he must possess powers of logical reasoning and have an eye towards the future. Everyone cannot attain the stature of a Fiqh scholar.

For Imam Malik, being a Fiqh scholar was a very responsible position. He himself relates that he did not start his work of Fiqh till he had the assurance of 70 scholars of Fiqh regarding his capability for the job. Despite the approval of the body of scholars, he exercised extreme caution in passing verdicts. He never passed a judgment on the basis of mere opinion or guesswork. One of his students commented that if he counted the "don't knows" of Imam Malik he would fill slates and slates.

Ibn Abdullah relates that a man came to Imam Malik after traveling for six months. He asked Malik to solve the issue he had brought. Imam Malik replied that he did not possess enough knowledge to answer the question satisfactorily. The man was amazed, "I have reached here after a journey of six months to ask you this question. When I go back what will I tell the people (who are waiting for an answer)?" Malik very calmly answered that he should state the truth, which was that Imam Malik did not have a satisfactory answer.

Imam Malik had hordes of people coming to him with their queries. The government of the time had formally announced that the authority to give Islamic rulings at the time of Hajj had

just been given to Ibn Abi Zaib and Malik Bin Anas. Despite this formal acknowledgement, Imam Malik used to exert a lot of effort and energy towards reaching the right conclusion. He did not leave a stone unturned in his quest for the truth.

Once somebody commented to the Imam that he made untiring efforts in giving rulings, so much so that according to Imam Malik's own statement he had many a sleepless night when he was worried about an issue, although Muslims considered his judgment the last word on the subject. When the humble Imam heard of this, his comment was that in that case, he should work even harder (so as not to disappoint the people).

Imam Malik would accept his mistakes graciously without any rancour. His high qualifications did not pose a barrier to his self-improvement. Once his student Ibne Wahab corrected him by presenting an authentic Hadith. Imam Malik at once accepted his verdict and based his future rulings on this alteration.

Imam Malik was not in favour of imposing his opinions on others. The Caliph Haroon Rasheed, like his predecessor Mansoor, wanted the entire Muslim Ummah to abide by the rulings of Malik, but the Imam declined.

Main Principles of Maliki School of Thought

Imam Malik remained involved in the work of Islam for 62 years, be it lectures on Ahadith or giving religious rulings. In his lifetime, he saw his religious legal system – the Maliki School of Thought – gain mass popularity. It is appropriate to mention the distinguishing characteristics of the Maliki School of Thought.

1. The Maliki System of Law seldom resorted to Ijtehad (deduction by analogy). Most of the solutions came from reference to the Quran and Sunnah and from the traditions

of the Companions of the Prophet (SAW). Imam Malik would avoid answering hypothetical questions – issues that could arise but had yet not taken place. He used to state: "Ask me about what has happened; leave out what has not actually occurred."

2. Besides the Quran, Sunnah and occasional Ijtehad, weighting was also given to the tradition and collective action of the citizens of Madina. This was because Madina was the centre of Islamic caliphate since the time of the Prophet (SAW), center of Isalmic Shariah, education and legal system. The rulings given by the scholars in Madina were therefore accorded extraordinary importance.

3. Public welfare was also included among the rules of Fiqh in the Maliki School of Thought. When Imam Malik could not find any proof in the Quran and Sunnah he would deduce a ruling by keeping public welfare in mind. These principles contributed to the fulfillment of the same objectives for which Islamic Shariah existed i.e. for the betterment of humanity. For inclusion in the Fiqh, these laws had to meet two requirements:

    - they had to pertain to worldly affairs and not any form of worship.

    - they had to pertain to the *needs* of the society rather than the *wants* or luxuries. This could include religion, life, property, inheritance, intelligence, etc.

A few examples that can be quoted are the levy of taxes on the rich citizens in order to meet the defense expenditure of the state, the forfeiture of a thief's possessions in exchange for the money or things looted by him (in addition to severing his hand), etc.

The followers of the Maliki School of Thought later on came to

be known as the Ahl-e-Hadith (the followers of Hadith). In this school of law, emphasis was not laid on the writing of books as in the Hanafi and Shaafai disciplines.

The Maliki influence spread to the heart of Arabia, Spain, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain and Kuwait. To this day, the Maliki Fiqh is followed in Africa. In Spain, the official Fiqh of the Umayyad government was also the Maliki School of Law. Later, this school of thought also influenced the west because they were impressed with the simple values of the people of Arabia.

Mautah Imam Malik

Mautah is the most important publication of Imam Malik. According to a tradition, Imam Malik had started work on Mautah on the request of Caliph Mansoor. The Caliph had apparently felt the need for a comprehensive compilation which incorporated the firmness of Ibn Umar (RA), the leniency of Ibn Abbas (RA), and the exceptions of Ibn Masood (RA). Mautah was published somewhere between 130 Hijri and 140 Hijri. Besides Ahadith, the Mautah included the Sunnah of the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) and the Taba'een (the next generation after the Companions). It also contained the rulings of the scholars of Fiqh and the religious derivations and deductions made by Imam Malik himself. In the beginning the book included some 10,000 Ahadith. After a lot of critical analysis and arguments 8,000 were dropped and only 1720 remained.

The word 'Mautah' means to trample on something. Mautah signifies the path through which a lot of people have passed. Sunnah also means the pathway – of the Prophet (SAW) – while Mautah is the pathway of the Companions after the death of the Prophet. Thus the word Mautah is self-explanatory.

The subject matter discussed in the Mautah pertains to the

rulings of Fiqh and hence it is known as the Book of Sunnah. The Mautah has the honor of being the second most authentic book (based on Ahadith) after the Quran. Another distinction is the fact that it contains short chains of narration. In Bukhari, for instance, we find 4-5 chains of narrators upto the Prophet (SAW), but the Mautah has chains that include only three narrators and at times only two connections. This makes it more reliable because the lesser the number of intermediaries the more likely that the Hadith is authentic. Imam Shaafai comments, "No book is more authentic than Mautah-Imam Malik on the face of this earth, besides the Book of Allah."

It would be appropriate to mention an incident related to Imam Malik's sincerity of purpose during the compilation of this work. When Imam Malik was busy with the collection of Ahadith for Mautah, many other scholars of Madina also started compiling their own collections of Ahadith. When Imam Malik was apprised of this, he merely stated, "Only pure intentions will endure." Time proved the veracity of this meaningful statement of Malik's and his prediction proved to be true. The Mautah of Imam Malik is available to us to this day while the collections of other scholars of the time have been wiped out completely.

The Mautah also enjoyed the privilege of being admired by Caliphs Mehdi, Haadi, Rasheed, Mamoon and Amin. They made a special effort to travel for the purpose of acquiring knowledge of this book. To the extent that in the 6th century Hijri, Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi made a long journey from Cairo to Alexandria just to gain an understanding of this book.

Besides the Mautah, a number of other books are attributed to Imam Malik, but some scholars think that they were the work of his students.

Among Malik's famous students are Imam Shaafai, Mohammad Bin Al-Hasan, Yahya Bin Yahya Laisy, Suleman Bin Daud

Tuyalsi, Mohammad Bin Maubarak and Lais Bin Saad – all scholars of eminence and repute.

Death

Imam Malik fell ill in 179 Hijri at the age of 86 years. He remained sick for about three weeks. People around him gauged from his condition that he would not live for long. The scholars of Madina gathered at his house. Tears were coming out of Malik's eyes. When asked about the reason for his unhappiness, the Imam replied, "If I don't have reason to cry, who else does? Oh, how I wish I was whipped for every ruling that I issued and I wish I had not passed any judgments." Probably the God-fearing Imam was referring to the rulings made by deductive analogy, as there is always a chance of error in such judgments.

Some time later, his soul departed from his body. There was a large procession in his funeral prayers. The governor of Madina also came on foot and was among the ones who carried the body of the Imam on their shoulders. The last resting place of Imam Malik was prepared in Jannat-ul-Baqi.

Desolation and gloom was seen in the entire Muslim Ummah as the news of Malik's death coursed through the Islamic caliphate. Sufyan Bin Ainia, a scholar, was stunned when he heard the sad news and commented, "Malik has not left his equal on the face of the earth."

Personality and Character

The story of Imam Malik would be incomplete without a special mention of his unique character and selective life events. Let us take a brief look at his personality and lifestyle.

Physically the Imam was a tall man, heavily built. He had a broad forehead and a pleasing complexion. He used to don

costly garments and used to order clothes from Aden. Aden, a city of Yemen, was famous in those days for its high-quality and expensive clothing. Imam Malik was fond of perfume. He was of the opinion that the blessings of Allah should be evident by the physical appearance of the person.

The Imam resided in a rented house. This was the blessed house where Abdullah Bin Masood (RA), the famous companion of the Prophet (SAW) used to live.

Imam Malik had a quiet temperament. He would give brief but comprehensive answers to questions asked. Once somebody asked how his morning had passed. He replied, "There has been a reduction in my life and an increase in my sins."

Whenever he would be free from teaching he would recite the Quran. On Friday night and the night of the first day of the month, he would spend the entire night praying.

Imam Malik was a formidable personality, but he was devoid of ego and arrogance. At one time, Imam Shaafai was a student and a guest at Imam Malik's house. He relates, "One day, after his dinner, Imam Malik inquired about the state of the citizens of Makkah. When it became dark, the Imam instructed me to go to sleep and departed. I was tired and fell asleep as soon as I lay on the bed. In the last part of the night, there was a knock on my door, somebody was telling me to get up for Fajr prayers. I got up and saw that Imam Malik himself was standing outside with a pot of water in his hands. I was highly embarrassed but he insisted that it was a duty to serve the guest."

There was no malice or revenge in his nature; in fact he was very forgiving and tolerant. The governor of Madina, a man appointed by Caliph Mansoor, had the Imam whipped and paraded before the entire city. Caliph Mansoor was dismayed and shocked when he was informed and asked for the Imam's forgiveness. He then issued orders that the governor should be

humiliated and brought to Baghdad on a donkey. Imam Malik merely said, "I have no need for this revenge; I forgive this man due to the fact that he belongs to the family of the Prophet (SAW)."

Imam Malik had no interest in having his opinion accepted by people as the final word on religious matters. Two of the Caliphs, Mansoor and Haroon, tried to get his book, the Mautah, established in the Islamic caliphate as the final word on Fiqh. Imam Malik was not in favour of this option. He stated, "Don't do that! The Companions of the Prophet (SAW) often differed in minor issues. They took up residence in different countries. Each one of them was on the right track."

Today we see different groups of scholars trying to gather a following and trying to convince others to their point of view as the only right one. There is a shining example in Malik's personality for our scholars to follow.

Imam Malik greatly valued knowledge. We have already mentioned the special preparations he would make for the sessions of Ahadith. When Caliph Mehdi stopped at Madina after Hajj, he ordered both his sons Moosa and Haroon to listen to the recitation of Mautah from Imam Malik. The princes sent for the Imam to come and teach them the book. Imam Malik replied, "Knowledge is a priceless commodity, the interested ones themselves walk towards it." At last, the two princes themselves appeared before him. The guide accompanying the princes asked the Imam to begin the recitation. Malik told him that it was traditional that the students should read and the teacher should listen. When Caliph Mehdi was informed, he told his sons to follow the tradition of the scholars. In the end, the princes started reading the book and Imam Malik heard them out.

After Mehdi, the next Caliph Haroon Rashid also stopped at Madina after Hajj. He also summoned the Imam for the

dictation of his book. Imam Malik refused and appeared before him without the book. When the Caliph complained about his behaviour, he stated, "Haroon! This knowledge has flown from your house (referring to the Prophet), it is upto you to demean it or to exalt it!" Caliph Haroon was speechless. Then he appeared with his two sons in the Imam's class. When he saw the multitude of students he requested that they should be asked to leave. The Imam answered that it was not possible to sacrifice the interest of the masses for the interest of a few individuals. Caliph Haroon than seated himself on a higher platform. Imam could not bear this and told Haroon that humility would be preferable. Ultimately, Caliph Haroon sat among the regular students for the hearing of the Mautah.

On the one hand, Imam Malik showed no special consideration to the Caliphs and other important officials, but on the other when Imam Abu Haneefa came to meet him, he spread his own sheet for him. Sometimes, he would go to receive and welcome his students outside the city.

There is no doubt that the Abbasid Caliphs had their fair share of faults, but it goes to their credit that they had a love for knowledge and they highly respected religious scholars. Using their inclination towards scholars, Imam Malik used his influence to bring their attention towards the deprived of Madina. The Caliphs would not turn down any request made by the Imam and they would open their treasury to alleviate the suffering of the poor in Madina.

Imam Malik never misused this influence to hoard wealth for himself but tried to work for the betterment of the downtrodden elements of the city – those who had low income and low status. Today, the elite and the socially networked elements of the society need to emulate the example set by Imam Malik. Individuals who have been blessed with wealth, power, connections and status should use these for the uplifting of the

masses. Activities of public welfare are longer lasting and better for the Hereafter. On the other hand, efforts for personal gains are not worthwhile because they are short-lived and do not benefit us in the next life.

The outstanding characteristics of Imam Malik's personality were his intelligence, sincerity of purpose, scholarship, recognition of the truth and its pronouncement without fear and intense love for the Prophet (SAW). Imam Malik was one of those scholars who gained enormous popularity during his lifetime. He received the titles of Imam-ul-Kabeer (the great Imam), Imam Darul Hijra (Imam of the Migration City) and Imam-e-Madina. The system of Fiqh established by Imam Malik has been guiding hundreds of millions of Muslims for the past thirteen centuries.

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Naima Sohaib, 40, is the author of "Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shaksiat", a 500-page book in Urdu about twenty most prominent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author.

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IMAM SHAAFAI

Naima Sohaib

Muslim Heroes series No. 6

Translated by Eman Asif Misbah

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

This booklet is sixth in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by my good friend Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. It tells us about these unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam.

This booklet is about an extraordinary Muslim hero from the world of learning. Imam Shaafai was a well-traveled scholar and a magnificent teacher. In the beginning, our hero was mainly interested in the study of Arabic linguistics, but later he decided to focus on the study of the Quran, the Hadith and Islamic Jurisprudence.

Imam Shaafai's main contribution is his highly original work in determining the bases and guidelines for the principles of Fiqh. In this he integrated the knowledge of the traditionalists of Madinah with the insights of the rationalists of Iraq. He was the founder of the Shaafai School of Thought which is dominant in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and South East Asia.

May Allah reward Sana Dossul, Misbah Anwar and Sohaib Umar for editing this piece of work, Nadeem Siddiqui for the design work, and Asif Misbah, my husband for his constant encouragement and support.

Eeman Asif Misbah

Imam Shaafai

The Founder of the Shaafai School of Thought and the Compiler of Principles of Islamic Fiqh

Introduction

His name was Mohammad Bin Idrees, his Kuniat Abu Abdullah, and his title Nasir-us-Sunnah (The Helper of Sunnah). He was related to the Prophet (SAW) in the seventh generation. He was proud to belong to the family of Abdul Muttalib. His mother came from the famous and honorable Yemeni tribe of Azd.

According to traditions, his grandfather Saaib bin Ubaid and his great-grandfather Shaafay were both Companions of the Prophet (SAW). They accepted Islam after the Battle of Badr. His father Idrees bin Abbas was a resident of a town called Tabala near Madina. Then he moved to Madina. Later on, his father migrated to Syria to earn a better living and settled in the city of Asqalan.

Birth

Imam Shaafai was born in Rajab 150 Hijri in Asqalan (Gaza, bordering Palestine and Syria). In the same month and year Imam-e-Azam Abu Haneefa died.

Childhood Events

Although Imam Shaafai belonged to a respectable family, the Yemeni tribes living in and around Palestine were afflicted with poverty. The family of Imam Shaafai was also poor and his father had passed away, leaving him an orphan. According to a

narration, his father died a few days before his birth. The burden of his upbringing fell solely on his mother, who was a sensible woman. She felt that if he was brought up in this environment, he would not take his lineage any further. Thus, she brought her son to Yemen where her brother lived. In the eight years that Imam Shaafai stayed in Yemen, he memorized the Holy Quran. He also started to learn the Mautah of Imam Malik (famous book written by Imam Malik).

It would be relevant to mention an incident here. Imam Shaafai was fortunate to see the Prophet (SAW) in his dream when he was a young boy. In this dream, the Prophet (SAW) gave him glad tidings.

Education and Upbringing

As mentioned earlier, Imam Shaafai's mother was very particular about her son's upbringing and education. At the age of ten, she brought the young lad to Makkah. They settled down here and Imam Shaafai involved himself in learning. He had been blessed with a superb memory and a brilliant mind. He was inclined towards the acquisition of the Science of Ahadith. Whenever he came across a Hadith he would instantly commit it to memory, or write it on a piece of cloth or skin, and would make a collection of Ahadith. He was residing with his uncle who was not a rich man. Because of paucity of resources, Imam Shaafai could not afford to buy paper, so he would make do with bones of animals. Soon the house was filled with these bones and other articles with Ahadith written on them.

Imam Shafaai had an extraordinary fondness for the Arabic language. He associated himself with the Huzail tribe and left Makkah. This nomadic tribe was well-known for its prowess in the Arabic language. Imam Shaafai would travel with these people as they wandered from place to place and he would imbibe their prose and style of conversation. When he returned to Makkah, he had become an expert in Arabic linguistics. An

authority in the Arabic language and prose, Asmai reports, “For the correction of the poems of the tribe of Huzail and for the explanation of their folklore, I would turn to a young man of the Quraish whose name was Mohammad Bin Idrees” (Imam Shaafai’s actual name).

His vocabulary was so incredible and vast that Imam Razi comments, “Imam Shaafai was the king of experts in Arabic linguistics. This is a firmly established fact like the generosity of Haatim Tai and the courage of Ali (RA).”

Imam Shaafai spent three years as a student under the tutelage of Muslim bin Khalid who was an Imam and Mufti of Fiqh and Hadith in Makkah. His teacher had recognized the potential in his young student and subsequently gave him the permission to issue religious rulings (Fatwas). In these sessions with his mentor, Imam Malik’s name was often mentioned. There grew in the heart of Imam Shaafai such a keen desire to meet Imam Malik that he memorized the Mautah (the most important book written by Imam Malik). Further, he appeared before the governor of Makkah and requested him to write an introductory, pleading letter to the governor of Madina and to Imam Malik himself.

Under Imam Malik’s Tutelage

When Imam Shaafai appeared before the governor of Madina with the letter, the governor was visibly upset upon learning that he wanted to meet and receive religious guidance from Imam Malik. He said, “Young man! It is far easier for me to be dragged from Madina to Makkah on foot than to appear before Imam Malik. As long as I am present at his door, I am deprived of any welcome from him.” It must be mentioned here that Imam Malik was not fond of entertaining the rulers and the elite and accorded them no special status.

On the insistence of Imam Shaafai, they both appeared before

Imam Malik. While reading the letter, when Imam Malik reached the point where the letter pleaded with him to speak to Shaafai and to accord him a warm welcome, and to fulfill his need, he threw the letter on the ground and exclaimed, "Glory be to Allah! Will the knowledge of Rasool Allah's (SAW) religion be obtained with resources and influence now?" The governor of Madina was paralyzed with fear and could not utter a word in awe of Imam Malik's towering personality. In the end, Imam Shaafai stepped forward and pleaded his own case, "I am from the family of Abdul Muttalib, I am a Hashmite, this is my condition and this is my state…."

Imam Malik listened to the words and cast a glance at young Shaafai asking his name. Shaafai answered that his name was Muhammad. Imam Malik stated, "O Muhammad! Always fear Allah. Keep away from sins. You will reach a high status one day. Allah has illuminated your heart with His Light. Do not let this light be extinguished by the shadow of sins!" Then he further instructed Shaafai to come the next day and to bring along another man who would read out the Mautah for him.

The following day Imam Shaafai showed up with the Mautah in his hands. He started the recitation of the Mautah himself. With feelings of trepidation and awe of his teacher he began; whenever he would endeavour to stop reading, Imam Malik would encourage him to read further because of his eloquence and beautiful recitation. In a few days, the reading of the Mautah came to an end. Then he stayed on with Imam Malik and gained knowledge of the different issues of Fiqh.

Besides Imam Malik, he acquired religious knowledge from Ibrahim bin Ansari, Muhammad bin Ismaeel Fadeek and Abdullah bin Nafay in Madina.

Later, Imam Shaafai returned to Makkah. Imam Shaafai was still a young man while he had gained expertise in Hadith, Fiqh, Linguistics, History and Medicine. He also had an acute insight

in human behaviour. This is called Ilm-e-Farasat in Arabic. *Farasat* means quick perception of a matter. This God-given quality possessed by Imam Shaafai used to amaze people at times.

Imam Baihaqi related the tradition by Mazni who was once in the company of Imam Shaafai in the Jamiah Mosque. By chance, a man stepped in and began searching for someone among the men sleeping on the floor. Imam Shaafai told Rabee to ask the man if his black slave with a defect in his eye had disappeared. When Rabee conveyed the message, the man came over to the Imam and asked him where his slave was. Imam Shaafai anwered that he would probably find the lost slave in the gallows. The man went to the gallows and actually found his slave there. Mazni turned to the Imam and inquired, "You have truly amazed us all. Please throw light on this matter."

The Imam replied, "When the man entered the mosque, I gathered that he was looking for a runaway man. Then he went to that portion of the mosque where the black people were sleeping. On observing further I noticed that he was looking carefully at the left eye of each person. Hence I came to the conclusion that he was looking for a black slave with a defect in the eye who had run away." Mazni further inquired how the Imam knew that the black slave would be in the prison. Imam Shaafai replied that experience had taught him that when a slave was hungry, he would steal, and when he was full, he would commit adultery. In both cases, he would be put in prison for the crime. The Imam said that he gathered it would be one of these two matters, and he was right.

The Period of Hardship

When Imam Shaafai returned to Makkah, his mother was beset with financial troubles. He still yearned to fulfill his deep love for learning, but monetary constraints forced him to seek a

living. At this time, the governor of Yemen was in Hijaz. Some people of the Quraish mentioned the Imam's name to the governor who invited Imam Shaafai to come with him to Yemen. In the words of the Imam, "At that time my mother did not even have the resources to meet my traveling requirements. In the end, she mortgaged our home in order to raise some cash. When I reached Yemen I started work and performed the tasks assigned to me by the governor."

In a short while, the news of Imam Shaafai's wisdom and justice spread far and wide. According to one tradition, he was offered the governance of Najran. The elite of Najran were a corrupt, sycophant lot. They would resort to bribing the ones in command in order to secure favours for themselves. When they realized that they could not get special allowances from Imam Shaafai they turned against him and started hurling accusations at him. However, the common people of Najran were devoted fans of the Imam.

The governor of Yemen was responsible for the city of Najran and could not digest the fair dealings of this new ruler. He was waiting for the right opportunity to get rid of Imam Shaafai. He got this chance when the Alavi clan started rising up against the Abbasid Dynasty. He wrote to Caliph Haroon Rasheed saying that there were Alavi rebels present in Najran and that he suspected that they would revolt against the government. He further added that among these rebels was a member of the Muttalabi family (Imam Shaafai, a descendant of Abdul Muttalib) who neither listened to him nor obeyed his orders and restrictions.

According to another tradition, a noble of the ruling party wrote a letter to Caliph Haroon Rasheed saying that if he wanted peace and security in Yemen he should expel Muhammad Bin Idrees (Imam Shaafi) and punish him. According to the letter, Shaafai had a lot of influence in Yemen and the descendents of

the Prophet (SAW) were again dreaming of their own caliphate. It further insinuated that as Shaafai himself was a Hashmite, he supported the cause of the Sadaat (descendants of the Prophet).

Whatever the reason, Caliph Haroon Rasheed lost control of his emotions and called to account all those who were suspected of rebellion. Imam Shaafai was also arrested. The Caliph announced the execution of all these men. When it was the turn of Imam Shaafai, he made such an effective and heart-rendering speech that Haroon Rasheed started trembling with fear. He cancelled the execution orders of the Imam. The Caliph decided to consult Imam Muhammad before making a final decision about the fate of Imam Shaafai (Imam Muhammad has been mentioned before in other booklets of this series; he was the prize pupil of Imam Abu Haneefa). When Imam Muhammad was approached for his opinion regarding Imam Shaafai, he stated, "Shaafai has gained a major portion of religious knowledge. He is not like what some people are making him out to be." The Caliph decided not to make a hasty judgment about Imam Shaafai and asked Imam Muhammad to keep Shaafai under his watchful eye.

This tribulation that affected Imam Shaafai in his 34th year proved to be a blessing from Allah. Imam Muhammad took him under his wing and Imam Shaafai got a chance to study firsthand the principles and legal issues of the Hanafi school of thought.

Under Imam Muhammad's Tutelage

As a student of Imam Muhammad, Shaafai found the doors of religious knowledge once again open for him and he resumed his Islamic education – this time Hanafi Fiqh being the subject. He himself states, "Whatever I imbibed, learnt, heard, and copied from Imam Muhammad, was equal to a full load on a camel's back (i-e a great deal)."

As a student, he had the utmost respect for his honoured teacher. At times he was seen making a humble request before Imam Muhammad for the clarification of some issues. He was very vocal in the praise of his esteemed mentor. Imam Shaafai commented on another occasion, "Whenever I would approach a sensitive topic with some other expert on Fiqh, I would sense some kind of reluctance or displeasure on their face, but never so in case of Imam Muhammad."

There were certain issues in the Hanafi School of Thought that Imam Shaafai differed with, but he would withhold his opinions in front of his teacher. On the other hand, once Imam Muhammad had left the class, he would have confrontations and heated debates with other students. Once the students informed Imam Muhammad that Shaafai would argue in his absence. On hearing this, Imam Muhammad persuaded Imam Shaafai to argue with him on controversial topics. Shaafai started the debate with great reluctance on his part, and according to some traditions, his arguments carried more weight and he won.

The relations between the two Imams were very cordial and warm. Imam Muhammad was known to have helped out his student during hard times. The two were also seen walking hand in hand.

Stay in Makkah and Widespread Fame

Imam Shaafai came to Makkah from Baghdad and started giving religious sermons there. Now he had gained tremendous knowledge and wide exposure. He had benefited from the scholars of both Madina and Iraq, which were highly regarded as centers of Fiqh learning. Allah had blessed the Imam with unusual qualities in rational thinking, logical argumentation and critical analysis. He could reach the depth and fine points of an argument quickly. His fame spread far and wide in the Islamic empire. Students started coming from all over the Islamic

world to benefit from his scholarship.

Hajj was a special occasion when a lot of people would come and sit in his study circles to learn from him. Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, who is recognized as the fourth Imam in the world of Islam came to attend his sermons during the Hajj season. He was very impressed by Imam Shaafai and would always accord him a lot of respect and honour.

Ishaaq bin Rahviya, a scholar, writes: "Once Imam Hanbal approached me and told me to come with him to meet a personality that I had never seen before. I stood up to go with him. Hanbal took me to the area where Zamzam was located. There, a man clad in white clothes was seated. A wheatish complexion, a glowing face radiating with intelligence and wisdom – Hanbal seated me next to him. He introduced me to the man, who welcomed me and received me very warmly. Then we started talking. During the course of the conversation I became aware of the vastness and depth of knowledge possessed by this man. He also had an amazing memory.

When some time had passed, I asked Ahmad bin Hanbal to take me to the person who he had mentioned. Ahmad replied that this was the very man that he wanted me to meet. I was surprised and said that this was a young man. I told him that he had asked me to leave the company of the person who narrated traditions from Zehri (a great scholar of Hadith). So I thought he would take me to one who would be a Sheikh like Zehri or someone who at least was equal to him (Ishaaq bin Rahviya had assumed that he was to be taken to meet an elderly scholar with a typical white beard). Ahmad answered that I should learn something from this man and that he had never met any other scholar who had reached the same heights as Imam Shaafai."

Imam Shaafai was not only a scholar of religious sciences, but he also had an unusual talent for debate and argumentative discussions. No man could gain an edge over him in a

confrontational contest. Many examples are found in books. It would not be possible to expound on these discussions. We would briefly like to touch on two incidents which reveal the presence of mind and quick wit of the Imam.

Imam Shaafai once asked Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, "I have heard that you proclaim a man to be a disbeliever if he forgoes one prayer." Imam Hanbal replied in the affirmative. Imam Shaafai again inquired, "If such a man wants to become a Muslim (again), what does he have to do?" Imam Hanbal replied that he should start praying again. Imam Shaafai quipped, "Do you think a disbeliever's prayer would be acceptable or would he have to convert first in order to pray?" (meaning would this extreme stance suggest that he would have to read the kalma again before resuming prayers?).

Similarly, once the scholar of Fiqh, Rabiah, told the Imam, "If a man misses a fast in Ramadan, he should keep 12 fasts to make up for that one fast, because a day in Ramadan is equal to 12 days of any average month." Imam Shaafai replied, "Is this Fiqh or a joke? If this is your viewpoint, then if a prayer is missed on The Night of Power (Shab-e-Qadr), then the makeup should be praying for a thousand months, because the Quran says Lailutal Qadr is better than a thousand months." At this response, Rabiah lapsed into silence.

The Basis of Principles of Fiqh

In the days of Imam Shaafai, a lot of incorrect and illogical concepts had incorporated into the science of Fiqh. Some were there because of the natural differences in cultures since Islam was spreading rapidly among neighbouring countries. Some issues were deliberately created by trouble-makers who used to ask the scholars of Fiqh hypothetical questions and expect an intelligent answer. The scholars used to give answers based on their natural aptitude and depth of knowledge. Because of the differences in God-gifted abilities, thought processes and

experience, the answers given by different scholars were often contradictory. The people would accept the answers of the mentor that they followed, and would necessarily deem it the only solution. These rulings would become the last word and the adherents of different scholars would accord them the same status as they would to the sayings of the Quran and Hadith.

The dwellers of one city would not accept the opinion of scholars from other regions. In this way, the Fiqh of Hijaz, Kufa and Syria had acquired a distinct flavour. The point to understand here is that this is the behavior of adherents whose love for a person exceeds prescribed boundaries. On the other hand, if we look at truly educated, refined scholars and common people, they not only accepted the points of view of different scholars, but also did not hesitate to become students of any acclaimed scholar for the attainment of their educational goals.

It is a common reality that leaving aside the time of the Prophet (SAW), the number of far-sighted and levelheaded people in every age has been relatively a small fraction of the population. The majority of the people are those who have little knowledge, narrow minds and limited vision. They become easily confused by the profusion of contradictory rulings issued by different scholars and cannot distinguish right from wrong.

Imam Shaafai was carefully observing the situation. This period had been witnessing Imam Shaafai as a founder of modern Fiqh. Imam Shaafai had spent a lifetime in the study of Fiqh and related issues. He began to feel a need for guidelines that would help a person decipher truth from falsehood and lead him to the right conclusion. Hence he started deliberating on a set of guiding principles for rulings on different issues.

Instead of turning to the Hanafi and Maliki schools of thought that were prominent in those days, he first turned to the Book of Allah – the Quran – for guidance. He concentrated on the way that proofs and arguments were presented in the Quran. The

next step was the Sunnah – ways of the Prophet (SAW) and his techniques of logical reasoning. If the Quran and Hadith were silent on a matter, he devised rules for decisions regarding it. He further suggested limitations that should be exercised by scholars of Fiqh at the time of making logical analogies in religious matters. This would ensure that the scholars of Fiqh stay on the right track and do not deviate.

During his nine years of stay in Makkah Imam Shaafai succeeded in framing these guidelines and principles. He started applying these principles to the minutest of issues. He once again undertook a journey to Baghdad which was the centre of Fiqh. There, the scholars, teachers and students of Fiqh delightedly welcomed him in their midst. They started learning from him the priceless knowledge that he had accumulated and refined in Makkah over the past decade. Let us take a brief look at these principles. A detailed study would take too long. At a cursory glance, these principles state:

1. The origin of religion is the Quran and the Hadith. If the solution to a problem cannot be ascertained by these two sources the next step is to resort to logical analogy which is based on Quran and Hadith.

2. When it has been ascertained that a particular Hadith is completely authentic, then it must be adhered to. But however authentic a Hadith is, if it negates the Quran it will not be accepted.

3. A Hadith should always be understood in its obvious meaning. When several meanings can be attributable to a Hadith, the one closest to its obvious and literal meaning should be considered.

4. The Ijma (united view) of the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) on any issue is to be given more weighting than a Khabar-i-Wahid (a Hadith with very

few relaters). When an Ijma is not found, Khabar-i-Wahid can be implemented.

5. When there are contradictory Ahadith to be found, the character of the narrators must be studied; next in importance is the order of rulings given by the Quran or Ahadith, and the third is the time that the relating Companions reverted to Islam (the Companions who accepted Islam earlier on are given more weighting than the ones who reverted later).

6. Hadith-i-Mursil is unacceptable except if related by Saeed Bin Musayyab. Hadith-i-Mursil is a Hadith in which the chain is sound upto the Taba'een but after that the name of the Companion who heard it directly from the Prophet (SAW) is missing and it directly leads to the Prophet (SAW).

7. Hadith Mauqoof Munqatay stands nowhere in front of Hadith Muttasil Sahih. Hadith Mauqoof is one in which a Companion narrates without taking the name of the Prophet (SAW) or expresses his opinion. The Hadith in which one or more narrators are missing in the chain is called Munqatay. Hadith Muttasil Sahih is the type of Hadith whose chain of narrators is constant from start to end without anyone missing in between, and whose narrators are considered authentic, pious and possessing credible memory.

8. In the times of Imam Shaafai, there were a lot of recorded statements of the Companions. Some of these views would at times oppose an authentic Hadith. Imam Shaafai passed a ruling that in comparison to a Sahih Hadith, the opinions of the Companions carried no authority and stated, "They were only men and we are men too."

9. Every general rule has exceptions and a general rule cannot be absolute.

10. If an action contains both benefits and harm, then the negative should be dispelled first.

The first book that came out with these principles was Ar-Risala which gained immense popularity. Imam Razi, a writer, in his praise for Imam Shaafai talks about the publication of this book, "According to traditions, Abdur-Rahman bin Mehdi made a request to Shaafai while he was still a young man that a special book be written for him that included principles of deductions from Quran, Sunnah, Ijma and Qiyas (religious analogy). Likewise, it should mention Nasikh and Mansookh verses (those verses that cancel the orders in the previous verses e.g. earlier verses relating to alcohol were cancelled by later verses). Plus, it should also include levels of Umoom and Khusoos (general cases and exceptional cases). Hence Shaafai came out with a book that he named Ar-Risala. He sent a copy to Abdur-Rahman who was extremely impressed with the comprehensiveness of the collection."

During the two years that he spent in Iraq, Imam Shaafai remained busy in the teaching and spreading of his new school of thought. He would present it before different scholars and would also express his thought on different issues in the light of these guideline principles. After a period of two years, he returned to Makkah. In 198 Hijri, he made another visit to Baghdad. But after a stay of one month, he left for Egypt. It was not advisable for the Imam to stay in Baghdad anymore. Mamoon-ur-Rasheed was now the Caliph and he was influenced by the Mautazli thought. This group tried to find logical explanations behind every religious decree. A group of thinkers from this section surrounded the Caliph and influenced his every decision. This team was heavily into Ilm-ul-Kalaam (religious rhetoric). They would complicate the simple

teachings of Islam and tie knots around them because they were swayed by Greek philosophy. They would get carried away in purposeless arguments and issue fatwas (rulings) of Kufr (disbelief) to those people who would disagree from their thought process. This sect of people believed in getting their way by whatever means. Imam Shaafai disliked this whole rhetoric business immensely and decided to move to Egypt.

Disagreement with Imam Malik

As mentioned before, Imam Shaafai was Imam Malik's student. Shaafai showed the greatest respect for his esteemed teacher. If he disagreed with his views and opinions in some matters he would simply state his opinion without expressing his dissatisfaction openly. People would therefore continue to count Imam Shaafai among the Companions of Imam Malik.

Once it came to the notice of Imam Shaafai that a certain headgear of Imam Malik was treasured in Spain and the people used to pay respect to it. Also, when a Hadith was quoted on some issue, the adherents of the Maliki School would present Imam Malik's view on the matter (even if it were in contradiction with the Hadith). This reverence for Imam Malik over and above the value given to the Prophet's (SAW) words was not acceptable for Imam Shaafai. He thought to himself that at best, Imam Malik was a man, capable of making an erroneous judgment or going astray. The opinion of Imam Malik had no standing as compared to a Sahih Hadith.

Another point that occurred to Imam Shaafai while studying the Fiqh of Imam Malik was that at times Imam Malik would contradict the Ahadith that he himself quoted. He would do this by sticking to the literal principle and ignoring the derivative meanings at times; while at other times he would adopt the inferred meanings and leave the literal out. Hence he started writing his book titled "Opposition to Malik." It was not an easy task for Imam Shaafai to point out the failings and errors

of his larger-than-life teacher. But it was even more unbearable for him to see that the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) was paling in comparison to the words of a man. Imam Shaafai did not present his book to the masses for about one year after he had finished writing it. After this period of hesitation, he did an Istikharah (prayer to seek guidance from Allah in a dilemma) and then offered the book for public understanding.

In Egypt, the Fiqh of Imam Malik was firmly rooted. The followers of the Maliki School of Thought approached the Governor of Egypt and asked him to banish Imam Shaafai from the country. Imam Shaafai was convinced of the truth of his research work. He took a firm stand and stuck to his position. He did not waiver when he was confronted, nor did he try to avoid heated discussions. Without abusing or maligning anyone, Imam Shaafai would calmly present his arguments.

Besides opposing the Fiqh of Imam Malik, he was also against the system of Fiqh prevalent in Iraq. He criticized the scholar Auzai in his book "Al-Sair". The scholars of Iraq and Hijaz were well-known for their knowledge of Fiqh. The entire Islamic Empire used to look up to them for guidance in issues of Fiqh. Both these schools of thought became adversaries of Imam Shaafai for criticizing their systems of Fiqh.

A Balance between Ahl-e-Sunnah and Ahl-e-Rai

If we take a close look at the era of Imam Shaafai, we find that the scholars of Fiqh were divided into two groups – Ahl-e-Sunnah (those who primarily depended on the Ahadith for the solutions of Fiqh issues) and Ahl-e-Rai (those who overwhelmingly depended on their own opinion, rationale and deductions to find out solutions to Fiqh issues). The scholars of Ahl-e-Sunnah were well-known for their memorization of countless Ahadith. Their entire system of Fiqh was based on Prophetic traditions. If they could not find a Hadith on a subject, they would hesitate in giving an answer. If a matter

had not taken place, they would not voice an opinion about it. Some of these Ahl-e-Sunnah would even accept Ahadith which were not technically sound. To them, debates and argumentation were alien. Whenever a situation would arise when they had to give a ruling concerning contemporary matters, they would become nervous and at a loss for an answer.

At the other end, we had Ahl-e-Rai scholars who generally had a weak understanding of Ahadith. They would give rulings based on their opinions, although if they would later come across a Hadith pertaining to the issue at hand, they would compromise on their stance. These scholars would pass judgment on issues before they actually occurred – on mere hypotheses and assumptions – based on rational thinking and personal viewpoint. They would be cautious in relating the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) for fear of attributing something to him that was erroneous. That is the reason they would reject all weak Ahadith.

It is important to mention that an ordinary scholar of Hadith in those days did not take into account the principle of Darait (rejecting or accepting a Hadith on the basis of soundness of narrators and the content of the Hadith). Thus the Ahl-e-Rai scholars did not accept a number of Ahadith because they did not meet the criteria and principles of Darait.

The Ahl-e-Sunnah scholars were mostly residents of Hijaz, while the Ahl-e-Rai scholars were mostly based in Iraq.

Imam Shaafai was familiar with both schools of thought. He had gauged the strengths and weaknesses of both. He had already compiled rules for deduction of principles on which rulings could be based. He had memorized the Quran by heart and also knew the Ahadith of the Prophet (SAW) very well. Knowledgeable about the principles of Fiqh and an expert at debate and argumentation, the Imam was eloquent in Arabic speech. He had also gained an insight into the Mautazli way

(those who had a passion for rhetorical logic). He was so quick-witted that he could prove the opponent wrong by taking a cue from his own words. On the one hand Imam Shaafai defended the importance of the Ahadith and on the other he pointed out the weaknesses of the Ahl-e-Hadith scholars.

The Shaafai School of Thought

If we glance at the writings of Imam Shaafai it seems obvious that first he mentions the principles of deduction that he compiled. Then he mentions the issues that have conflicting viewpoints. After that he talks about the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) and the differences of opinion among his Companions. Finally he adopts those opinions that are consistent with his carefully laid out principles.

According to Imam Shaafai, religious knowledge can be divided into five levels according to their degree of importance:

1. The Quran and Sunnah

Imam Shaafai mentions the Quran and Sunnah together. In some of his writings he has recognized Sunnah to be very close to the Book of Allah, although not its equal. The reason is that as far as the Book is concerned, nothing can match it in terms of authenticity. On the other hand, the Sunnah can be divided into many grades – those that are Sabit, Mutawatir or Mashhoor have similar degree of authenticity as the Quran. But for instance, Ahadith-e-Ahad do not come close to the Quran (those Ahadith whose narrators in any group are not so many that their consensus on falsehood is considered unlikely). Likewise, if in a particular matter, the Quran and the Sunnah are not in agreement with each other, it is the Quran which will be followed.

Imam Shaafai preferred to explain the Quran by use of the Quranic verses themselves. But many verses in the Quran have

not been explained in detail. We come to know of their explanation and various components through the Ahadith. The Book of Allah states the principles while the Sunnah explains those standards.

2. Sunnah

In the era of Imam Shaafai the evil forces of deniers of Ahadith had reared their ugly heads. There were three factions among those who rejected the Ahadith:

- Those who completed rejected the need for consulting Ahadith.
- Those who accepted only those Ahadith that complemented the Quran.
- Those who only believed in the Mashhoor Ahadith.

At such a time Imam Shaafai rose and established the importance of Ahadith by proving it from the Quranic verses. He stated that Allah deems disobedience to the Prophet (SAW) to be the same as disobedience to the Creator Himself. Hence Sunnah is one of the main pillars from among the sources of Islam. It is a body of knowledge that is almost equal to the Quran in its status. He further gave credibility to even those Ahadith that were only related by one narrator (Khabar-i-Wahid) by citing examples from the Prophet's (SAW) life and those of his Companions. Those groups who blatantly rejected the authenticity of Ahadith were speechless in the face of such reasoning. But Imam Shaafai did specify that the single-narrated Ahadith (Khabar-e-Wahid) could not be deemed equal to the Quran. This is because there is no element of doubt in the Quran and the Sahih Ahadith. The Ahadith of less stature were only accepted after they met certain conditions. He also made certain criteria for the acceptance of one Hadith over another if they were contradictory.

In his book *Kitab-ul-Um*, Imam Shaafai records the details of the debates that he held with the scholars in Basra – those who opposed the authenticity of Hadith. These confrontations are also mentioned in his books *Ar-Risala, Kitab Jamaa-ul-Ilm and Ikhtilaful-Hadith.* Due to these prized contributions Imam Shaafai is known as *Nasir-us-Sunnah* (The Helper of Sunnah).

3. Ijma (Scholars' Consensus)

Imam Shaafai accepts Ijma as next in legitimacy after the Quran and Sunnah. According to him once the scholars of any era agree unanimously upon an issue, then it becomes an Ijma and is binding. The first Ijma that the Imam considers binding is the Ijma of the Companions of the Prophet (SAW). He recognized the consensus of all the scholars in the Islamic empire as credible – as opposed to Imam Malik who only considered the consensus of the scholars of Madina as legitimate. There is no doubt that Imam Shaafai used to hold the Ijma of the Madani scholars in great esteem and used to attach a great deal of value to them. In his book Ikhtilaful-Hadith, Imam Shaafai has clearly explained that the Companions of the Prophet (SAW), Tabaéen and Taba Tabaéen had a consensual view only on the binding duties in Islam; there is no Ijma on other issues.

4. Qiyas (Reasoning by Analogy)

Imam Shaafai was the first person to compile proper principles and regulations in Qiyas and to clarify the basis for the same. He was the first to explain the tremendous difference between a system based on Qiyas and a system based on Quran and Sunnah. He further elucidated the distinction between reasoning based on valid analogy and reasoning based on mere subjective logic. The scholars that came later took advantage of the Imam's definition of Qiyas and his principles for derivation of religious analogy. This helped them in developing a skeleton of the system of Fiqh.

We present here a paragraph from the famous book of Imam Shaafai – *Ar-Risala* – which shows us the status that he attributed to Qiyas and to the Quran and Sunnah:

"Any ruling of the Quran and Sunnah that is brought to light by a unanimous agreement of all the present scholars is valid in our opinion. But the Sunnah that is of a stand-alone nature and does not command consensus is valid only on a superficial level because there is an element of doubt in it. After the Quran and Sunnah, the next level is that of Ijma and then Qiyas. And Qiyas presents the least authentic argument. In the presence of authentic Ahadith, there is no basis for Qiyas. It is similar to tayammum (a way of performing ablution without water) which is allowed only when one does find water in a journey, but as soon as some water is found, the tayammum is no longer valid."

5. Istehsaan (Reasoning on the basis of Logic)

Imam Shaafai did not encourage *Istehsaan* which is purely rational reasoning in religion, not based on the Quran, Sunnah, Ijma or Qiyas (guided by Quran & Sunnah). There are several reasons for this. First, there cannot be any guidelines or principles for Istehsaan. Second, we see that even the Prophet (SAW) would rely on heavenly solutions to the issues present before him (except for a few events). Third, if his Companions would give rulings in his absence based on reason only, he would express his displeasure. Hence Imam Shaafai viewed as fallacious any deduction of religious rulings based only on rational thinking.

However, he deems as correct those rulings which go in favour of the general public. The technical term for these judgments is *Masaleh Mursala* – referring to those rulings based on opinions that are not derived from the Quran or Sunnah, but are for the common good and also do not contradict Shariah. In this regard, the Imam would avoid extremes by only considering those manifestations of 'common good' which are similar to

those found in the Quran and Sunnah.

Death

Imam Shaafai had been suffering from haemorrhoids for a long times. At times, the intensity of the disease was such that blood would start oozing from his body while he was on a mount and trickle down to his socks.

Another tradition tells us that once a man had a confrontation with the Imam and the fellow indulged in unrefined talk. The matter resulted in a court case and the Governor of Eygpt gave a verdict in favour of the Imam. This person or his supporters in a state of fury attacked the Imam in the darkness of the night and dealt such a severe blow to the Imam that his head split open. As it is, Imam Shaafai was very weak due to his illness; his condition was further aggravated and he now entered the throes of death.

In 204 Hijri on 30th Rajab Imam Shaafai's condition deteriorated at the time of Asr. At this time Imam Mazni was sitting on his side. He asked the Imam, "How are you feeling, O the teacher of teachers?" Imam Shaafai replied, "Today I am about to leave this world and am about to leave my brothers in faith. I am about to witness the punishment for my bad deeds. The time has come for me to be presented in Allah's court of law. And by Allah! I have no clue whether my spirit will enter heaven and I shall congratulate it or whether it will enter hell and I shall have to commiserate with it."

A few minutes before he died, Imam Shaafai made a will that a certain person who was absent should bathe him.

Then the Imam offered his Isha prayers. He had barely rested for a while when he slipped into semi-consciousness. The Imam's tongue was busy in praying and seeking Allah's forgiveness. A few minutes later his spirit left the body for the

heavenly abode. The next day he was buried in a graveyard outside Cairo after Friday prayers. A huge congregation had gathered to accompany the Imam to his final resting place. The sheer number of people was staggering. The Imam had passed away at the young age of 54 years, but his life and works had been worthwhile and fruitful for centuries to come.

After his death, the man about whom the Imam had willed to wash his body appeared. When the people apprised him of the Imam's words regarding him, the man forgave the Imam a loan of 70,000 dirhams and informed the people that this was what the Imam had meant by his last instructions.

Dealings and Morality

A large portion of the Imam's life was spent in the attainment of knowledge. When he established study circles he was surrounded by his students from morning to evening.

According to Rabee bin Suleman, "Imam Shaafai would offer Fajr prayers and start his discourse. Immediately the students of the Quran would appear. At sunrise they would leave and the learners of Hadith would replace them. They would ask questions regarding the meanings and explanation of various Ahadith. When the sun would go up, this group departed. Then the debate forum would commence. This group would carry on with their discussions nearly until noon. Then the next session would be held on Arabic language and its linguistics and this would continue through the afternoon."

When Imam Shaafai started his sermons in the Jamia Mosque in Baghdad, he had only six followers. In a short period, the number of students swelled to such an extent that no other scholar remained in the mosque.

A unique characteristic of the Imam which is rarely found in people was his uprightness and his sense of justice. He would

uphold the argument that seemed closer to truth and fairness, no matter how heavy a price he might have to pay for it. If he deemed a matter to be incorrect, he would speak up against it, be it the words of his teacher or of a school of thought he believed in.

Imam Shaafai always expressed his opinion confidently and boldly, even if it went against the common beliefs of the people. At the same time, he would critically review his own opinions and give them a second thought. That is why we find different views attributable to the Imam on the same issue. As a truth seeker, whenever an issue would clearly manifest itself before his eyes, he would reconcile his previous belief and support the new one.

In spite of his belief in his innovative, comprehensive and appealing approach to Fiqh issues he would consider the Ahadith of the Prophet (SAW) to be over and above all judgments and recognized the true worth of the Sunnah. In his book Maujam-e-Yaqoot, Rabee bin Suleman relates that once a person came to Imam Shaafai to inquire about a matter. During the conversation he pointed out that the Prophet (SAW) had said one thing but Imam Shaafai had a different view on it. When he heard this, the Imam started trembling with fear. He turned pale and remarked, "Which piece of earth will shelter me and which piece of sky will provide a shade for me if a Hadith of the Prophet (SAW) is brought to me and I don't accept it with perfect reverence?"

The Imam used to hold the family of the Prophet (SAW) very dear to his heart and this was obvious from many of his remarks. To the extent that people started calling him Rafizi (Rafizi is a Shiite sect that glorifies the family of the Prophet to the extreme). He refers to this accusation in one of his poems, "If the love of the family of the Prophet (SAW) is considered as Rafz then the angels should endorse me as a Rafizi."

Besides being a great scholar of religion, he was blessed with the most humane and honourable qualities. He was least interested in acquiring worldly possessions. Once at the time of Eid his wife requested him to take a loan as there was nothing in the house to eat. The Imam borrowed 70 dirhams from someone. On the way back to his house, he was surrounded by beggars. He distributed the entire amount among the poor and returned home empty-handed. When his wife heard the story, she commented that this was what he always did.

Imam Mazni related that once on the night of Eid he reached outside the Imam's house. He saw a slave greet Imam Shaafai and present to him a bag of coins from his master. A moment later a man came hurrying and said to the Imam "O Abu Abdullah! A baby has just been born in my house and I have no money to spend." The Imam gave the bag of coins to this person and smiling, walked into his home.

The early days of Imam Shaafai were spent in poverty and destitution. Later he was blessed with wealth by the grace of Allah. The Imam used to give openheartedly to the poor. He would hardly keep a quarter of what he got for his own needs. When people inquired about the reason for his excessive generosity, he remarked, "Listen! Allah grants money so that it can be used for the welfare of the poor! If I start benefiting from this wealth, what will be my state on the Day of Judgment when Rasool Allah (SAW) will be brought forward as an intercessor?" The Imam kept on repeating these words and kept on weeping.

Imam Shaafai left no stone unturned in attending to the needs of his students and friends. He was extremely hospitable. Even during debates and confrontations the Imam would be courteous to his opponents.

Imam Shaafai was a scholar of a very high caliber and his knowledge was so vast and versatile that there is not enough

space here to cover this topic. We would like to recall a student's comment who says in praise of Imam Shaafai, "When Imam Shaafai would expound on the Quranic verses it seemed as if he had personally seen the Quran being revealed to the Messenger (SAW)."

The Imam had a moving voice which used to mesmerize people. We record a statement of a contemporary from the book *The History of Baghdad*, "When we wanted to cry, we would ask a friend to come along to the young Muttalabi man and listen to his recital. Upon reaching his place he would start reciting the Quran. Soon the people nearby would leave their daily activities and gather around him weeping sorrowfully. Seeing this, Imam Shaafai would stop reciting."

The Imam had divided his night into three parts. He would sleep in the first bit. In the second part, he would carry out his reading and writing works, and the last portion would be utilized in the worship of Allah. Rabee, a student of the Imam comments, "Before Imam Shaafai migrated to Egypt, I spent a lot of time with him. The Imam had a black slave-girl. When he wished to write down something, he would ask her to light the lantern. She would get up and do so. Then the Imam would carry on writing as long as he wished to work. This was his normal mode of working. When he wished to ponder over some issues he would blow out the flame. I once asked him why he did that. The Imam replied that in the brightness of the light, his thoughts were not coherent; hence he would spend time in darkness – thinking."

The point to be noted is that Imam Shaafai had been blessed with exceptional qualities and superior intelligence. But the status he reached and the heights of fame that he touched were not only due to his extraordinary acumen, perfect memory, mesmerizing voice or outstanding oratory skills. Shaafai's life speaks of his laborious efforts and endless contemplation over

issues. Many of us are gifted with unusual talents and resources, yet only a few dare to undertake the sheer hard work needed to attain expertise and perfection necessary for a greater cause.

It would be interesting to consider yet another aspect of Imam Shaafai's personality. The Imam had benefited from the knowledge of the greatest scholars of his time. He spent valuable hours in their company and gave them tremendous respect. But hero-worship was never a part of his character. Imam Shaafai was simply a genius. He was never the one to follow his predecessors blindly. Due to his extraordinary grasp, superior intellect and innovative approach he would often contradict his beloved teachers. At the same time he would also profit from their attempts at Ijtehad (religious analogy) and their counsel. In either case, he would not hide his actions or be apologetic about them. Blindly following a leader or a school of thought may be considered acceptable for the masses, but for a scholar it is necessary to keep the spirit of a student and a true knowledge-seeker alive while researching for solutions of Fiqh issues. It is equally important to keep away from all kinds of prejudice, for or against any personality, school of thought or group of people. In this regard let us learn from the life of Imam Shaafai. May Allah be pleased with him.

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Naima Sohaib, 40, is the author of "Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shaksiat", a 500-page book in Urdu about twenty most prominent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author.

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IMAM AHMED BIN HANBAL

Naima Sohaib

Muslim Heroes series No. 7

Translated by Eman Asif Misbah

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

This booklet is seventh in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by my good friend Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. It tells us about these unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam. I hope that Muslims today will find their stories a source of inspiration.

The current narrative is about a remarkable Muslim hero from the world of learning. Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal attained the heights of scholarly knowledge at a young age and he was widely acclaimed by contemporaries in the Islamic world. He traveled far and wide to study Fiqh and Hadith. The task of collecting Ahadith took him to Kufa, Basra, Makkah, Madinah, Yemen and Syria. Many a journey was covered on foot and without sufficient resources to cover the travel cost. He founded the Hanbali School of Thought. His most famous work is Al-Musnad that contains about 30,000 Ahadith.

Imam Hanbal's greatness is not only due to his scholarly achievements. When faced with the task of standing up for the truth, which meant challenging the ruler of the time on the issue of "Doctrine of the Creation of the Quran", he demonstrated extreme courage and determination. He was persecuted, lashed, imprisoned and put in solitary confinement repeatedly. He faced serious death threats but he never wavered from his just stance.

May Allah reward Sana Dossul and Sohaib Umar for their editing, Nadeem Siddiqui for designing and Asif Misbah, my husband, for his constant encouragement and support.

Eeman Asif Misbah

Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal

The Founder of the Hanbli School of Thought and the Revolutionary of the Third Century Hijri

Introduction

His name was Ahmed, his kuniat Abu Abdullah and the title given to him was Imam ul Hafiz. There are contradictory opinions regarding his genealogy.

Imam Hanbal was a pure Arab. He belonged to the Sheebani tribe of Arabia both from his mother's and father's side. He was related to the Prophet (SAW) through his ancestor Nazar Bin Ma'ad Bin Adnan. His tribe was famous for feats of courage and fearlessness. Another member belonging to this tribe was Musanna Bin Harisa, who drew the first caliph Abu Bakr's attention towards the conquest of Iraq and who was famous for his military prowess. When the second Rightly-Guided Caliph Umar Bin Khattab (RA) founded the new city of Basra in Iraq, the family of Imam Hanbal settled there. Hence they came to be known as Basri.

Birth

Imam Hanbal was born in Rabi-ul-Awwal 164 Hijri in the city of Baghdad.

Childhood Events

Hanbal Bin Bilal, the grandfather of Imam Hanbal, migrated from Basra to Khurasan. He joined the army of the Umayyads. Successive promotions led him to become a commander, and later he was appointed the governor of the city of Surkhus.

When the Abbasids started to advocate their role in the caliphate and began inviting people towards the promotion of Banu Hashim, he became one of their supporters. He suffered a great deal in this cause.

Imam Hanbal's father Mohammad Bin Hanbal was also a soldier. He died when Imam Hanbal was of a tender age; according to some traditions, even before he was born.

His father did not leave much inheritance for his son. They had a single house in Baghdad, and a small piece of land which provided barely enough income to get by. The Imam's mother was a courageous lady. She had inculcated in her son the traits of patience, gratefulness, contentment and bravery.

Ahmed Bin Hanbal was a popular lad in his community because of his good manners and high morals. Many women approached him for the reading and writing of letters as their husbands were in the army and had been transferred to far-off locations. People would quote Imam Bin Hanbal in front of their kids as an example for them to follow. Observing his obedience and cultured mannerisms, the foresighted men in the community used to predict that if the boy lived for long, he would become a living example for his contemporaries.

From childhood Ahmed Bin Hanbal stayed away from vices and sins. Ahmed's uncle used to act as an informer for the governor of Baghdad in his absence. Once the governor summoned his uncle for some information on happenings in Baghdad. He wanted a written account of these activities. His uncle replied that he had already sent a letter with his nephew, Ahmed. When Ahmed was asked about the information that had been dispatched through him, he replied that he had thrown the correspondence into the river. Then he added that he had intended to bring the letters to the governor, but later it occurred to him that Allah had forbidden the act of spying and making it a regular part of one's life was wrong. Hence he threw the

bundle of information into the River Tigris. When he heard this, the governor of Baghdad was overcome with emotion. He said, "Woe is on us! We are worse than this lad. He is a pious boy. We cannot punish him for what he has done."

Education and Upbringing

Imam Hanbal was educated in the city of Baghdad. At that time, Baghdad was the prime centre of education for Islamic learning and culture. Students and scholars from all over the Islamic empire came here to seek knowledge.

Ahmed's mother did not prefer the family profession of military service for her son. Instead, she wanted him to become an Islamic scholar. When he was still a young boy, she registered him in a school. First, he memorized the Quran, and then he acquired knowledge of Arabic linguistics. Then he turned his attention to the art of writing. Ahmed himself states, "I was a young boy when I finished memorizing the Quran; at the age of 14, I started literary activities". He had a truly exceptional memory. He never forgot what he read once.

After completing his basic education, he now turned to the science of Hadith. At the age of 16, he started attending the study circles of Imam Abu Yusuf (the most famous student of Imam Abu Haneefa) and took his first Hadith lesson in his class. After completing this course, he went to the most eminent scholars of Hadith and Fiqh in Baghdad for the next seven years to further his knowledge. Included among these were Hushaim Bin Basheer, Umair Bin Abdullah, Abdur-Rahman Bin Mehdi, and Abu Bakr Bin Ayyash.

Imam Hanbal had a burning desire for learning and this thirst for knowledge made him restless. He himself states, "Very often I wanted to leave for a Hadith class early morning and my mother would tug at the hem of my shirt. She did not appreciate my leaving the house at such an early hour. Only

when we heard the Fajr call for prayer or saw the morning light would I be permitted to step out."

After learning what he could from the prominent scholars of Baghdad, Imam Hanbal decided to travel to other places for the attainment of further education. First, he proceeded to Basra. After that, he advanced towards Hijaz. During his journey to Hijaz he met Imam Shaafai, from whom he acquired the knowledge of the principles of the Shaafai School of Thought, and the clarification of the Verses of Nasikh & Mansookh (those verses in the Quran that abrogate the orders in the previous verses). Imam Hanbal also heard the entire Mauta of Imam Malik.

Imam Hanbal had a passionate attachment to the Ahadith of the Prophet (SAW). He was willing to make any kind of sacrifices for the attainment of Hadith knowledge. In 198 Hijri, he made up his mind to go for Hajj, and further travel to Sana'a, Yemen to meet and benefit form the eminent scholar of Hadith, Abdur Razzaq. His companion and fellow student Yahya Bin Mueen also accompanied him on this journey. They had just reached Makkah and had embarked on the circumambulation of the Kaabah that they spotted the same Abdur Razzaq busy in his worship. Ibne Mueen approached him and requested permission to appear before him the next day for the recitation of Ahadith. He commented to Imam Hanbal, "Allah has relieved you from a weary journey, and the fret for provisions for travel and the hassle of commute to and from Yemen." Imam Hanbal replied, "No, this is not the will of God. I had made an intention and I would have to break it if I heed your advice. We will proceed to Yemen as planned and hear the recitation of Ahadith there."

The journey to Sana'a was an arduous one because of lack of sufficient resources. When he had nothing left to go by, his companions offered to help, but Imam Hanbal refused. He

relied on the help of Allah alone, and worked as a laborer to earn money for his travel ahead. When he reached Sana'a, Imam Abdur Razzaq was shocked to see his condition and offered a bag of coins to him, but Imam Hanbal did not accept it. He stated politely, "I am grateful to Allah. I am fine in whatever state I am in." The next two years passed under very stringent circumstances.

In spite of extreme poverty, he continued to travel to different places in pursuit of further knowledge. He journeyed to Basra and Hijaz five times each. He performed Hajj three times and each time he had no more than 20-30 dirhams at hand. The exhaustion involved in travel and the dearth of resources did not dampen his spirits. Carrying a heavy burden of books on his back, Imam Hanbal would go on journeying from place to place.

Besides the knowledge of Ahadith and their memorization, Imam Hanbal had a deep interest in the science of Fiqh and deduction of principles. He had promised Imam Shaafai that he would come to Egypt to learn the principles of derivation in matters of Fiqh. Similarly, he intended to go to Ray in order to learn from the scholar Jarir Bin Adbul Hameed. But he did not get the opportunity to travel. Imam Hanbal states, "I was very hopeful that even if I had ten dirhams I would travel to Ray. I would watch my companions move towards this destination. But due to poverty I could not embark on the journey." Ibne Abi Hatim tells us that this was probably the reason why he did not travel to Egypt as well to meet Imam Shaafai again.

With the blessings of Allah and a profound passion for Islamic knowledge on his side, Imam Hanbal achieved an enviable position of great eminence among Islamic scholars. According to a conservative estimate, he knew hundreds of thousands of Ahadith by heart. To reach such a high status is by no means a small task. It needs persistent hard work and dedication. Imam

Hanbal himself relates how he would attend the study circles of Yahya Bin Qitaan (an eminent student of Abu Haneefa). He would be so overawed by his great teacher that he dared not sit in his presence. From late afternoon to sunset, Imam Hanbal would keep standing while learning the science of Rijaal (character traits of the narrators of Ahadith).

The Study Circle of Imam Hanbal

Imam Hanbal did not occupy the seat of teaching until he felt that he had explored all avenues for higher learning. Finally, he felt capable enough to start his own study circle.

Imam Hanbal was forty when he started giving sermons on religion. Earlier, if an individual asked for his opinion on an issue, he would grant an answer. As his popularity grew, and people flocked around him in droves with questions that needed to be answered, he realized the need for an organized setup in a mosque. This is the way his class commenced, and the news of this arrangement spread far and wide throughout the Muslim world. According to a tradition, there would be 5,000 people present in one session. Out of these, 500 would be regular students, while the rest were either there for receiving guidance or would just come to observe the Imam in action after hearing of his personality and character. The session would last from late afternoon to sunset.

His class would have a solemn atmosphere. Imam Hanbal would avoid idle talk. In a history book a companion of the Imam describes the atmosphere in these gatherings, “In no other gathering did I find a poor and resource less person (like Imam Hanbal) given so much regard and respect as in the class of Imam Hanbal. The Imam was not very social and would only have limited interaction with people. He was soft spoken and considerate. He did not like impatience and haste. He was naturally inclined towards serenity and good conduct. When he would enter his class, he would keep silent until somebody

asked him a question."

A special quality of Imam Hanbal needs to be mentioned here. In spite of having amazing powers of retention, Imam Hanbal would not rely on his memory alone in matters of Ahadith. While a student, he would take detailed notes. He always thought that there was a possibility of memory failing, causing distortion to the words of Ahadith, which is a grave sin. He would obviously know the Ahadith by heart, but when questioned by a student he would refer to his books and take out the relevant Hadith. According to his son, Abdullah, "I have never seen my father quote a Hadith to anyone without a book – on the reliance of memory alone. Except for a few Ahadith which would hardly number a hundred in total."

This extreme caution stemmed from the Imam's high level of concern for the authenticity of every word uttered by the Prophet (SAW). It is a fact that Imam Hanbal had been blessed with the highest intellect and acumen supported by a phenomenal memory. Yet he would strongly advise his students to follow the same method and to never quote a Hadith from memory.

The Trial

In every period Allah has sent trials and tribulations to separate the impure from the pure, the weak in faith from the strong in faith. In his lifetime, the test faced by Imam Hanbal was that of the Quran being labeled as a creation of Allah. This doctrine was adopted by the Mutazilites, a heretical Muslim sect, who sanctified their intelligence above revelation from Allah. They espoused that the Quran which we have in the form of a book contains words. These words have meanings and sounds, uttered through the tongue. Hence the Quran which has a tangible form is a creation of Allah, and is like any other creation of Allah.

The doctrine of the "creation of Quran" gained popularity in the Abbasid reign when Mamoon-ur-Rasheed became the caliph after his father Caliph Haroon-ur-Rasheed. The new Caliph became influenced by the Greek philosophers and was inclined towards the Mutazalite school of thought. The Mutazalites relied on pure logic in matters of religion. The followers of this sect would present many arguments based on rationale regarding every issue. When the Caliph Mamoon-ur-Rasheed would hold debates pertaining to beliefs he would get impressed with their prowess in reasoning. To the extent that for the highest posts in the Islamic Empire, he would select men from among the Mutazalites. Slowly and gradually, he came to accept the Quran as a "creation of Allah" as explained and understood by this sect.

In order to propagate this new school of thought to the entire Muslim empire, Caliph Mamoon wrote to the Governor of Baghdad, asking him to test the viewpoints of the judges in his domain. If they accepted the Quran as a "creation of Allah", they were to be left alone; otherwise their witness would not be recognized. A detailed report was prepared according to his orders and was presented to the Caliph. Then he summoned the seven most prestigious scholars of Baghdad and asked them for their opinion on the creation of the Quran. All the scholars agreed with the state opinion as they realized the gravity of the situation. This incident was heavily publicized among the masses so that their opinion could be influenced.

Then on the orders of Caliph Mamoon, another group of governors, Hadith scholars and Fiqh experts were summoned and questioned about their beliefs. The letter sent by the caliph was read out to these men of learning and the doctrine of the creation of the Quran was put across to them. Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal was also called and his opinion was sought on the issue. The Imam stated," Quran is the word of Allah." The governor of Baghdad, Ishaaq Bin Ibrahim asked if the Quran

was a creation of Allah. The Imam again replied that it was the word of God and that was it. On repeated insistence on the governor's part, Imam Hanbal quoted a verse from the Quran "There is nothing like God and He is All-Hearing and All-Seeing." Upon hearing this verse, the governor inquired about the meaning of the qualities of All-Seeing and All-Hearing. The Imam answered that Allah is like what He has defined Himself to be. The governor again asked the significance of this verse. Once more he received the same answer from the Imam. Then, other scholars and dignitaries were questioned about their beliefs and all except a few stated that the Quran was the word of Allah.

The opinions of all these experts and learned men were documented and sent off to Caliph Mamoon-ur-Rasheed. Meanwhile, these men were detained till subsequent orders of the Caliph were received. After a few days, a stern letter arrived from him. It contained harsh statements against Imam Hanbal. The letter stated that the Caliph had read whatever had been written to him about the former, and that Ahmed Bin Hanbal should be told that the Caliph was fully aware of his views and opinions which were based on ignorance. And that he would have to bear the consequences. Likewise, the dispatch contained maligning statements regarding all the Hadith and Fiqh experts who had rejected the faulty doctrine. Each one was mentioned and ridiculed and held in contempt.

Now we come to that part of the letter which started a never-ending succession of persecution and torture. Caliph Mamoon wrote to the governor regarding all those men of learning whose names had been mentioned in the document, those that the Caliph had named and those whose names had not been given – that if they did not believe in the doctrine of "the creation of the Quran", they should be tied with iron chains and brought to the Caliph accompanied by armed guards, with the exception of Bashar Bin Al-Waheed and Ibrahim Bin Al-Mehdi. They

would be tested on their beliefs and if they did not compromise on their opinion, and were not apologetic for their line of thinking, their heads would be chopped off with a sword.

On hearing this fearsome order, all the scholars except Imam Hanbal, Sajjadah, Muhammad Bin Nuh and Qawariri chose the path of ease and accepted that Quran was the creation of Allah. This is permissible in Islam under extreme duress and to save one's life. These men were allowed to go free. For the crime of speaking the truth, the above-mentioned four honorable men were chained and tied with ropes. Sajjadah and Qawariri buckled under pressure and they relented on their stance on the Quran. Now only two courageous and daring souls remained firm to their position. Ahmed Bin Hanbal and Muhammad Bin Nuh were both asked whether they would agree to the dogma under the sharp metal of the sword. They both replied in the negative. When there seemed no compromise in their stance, they were both sent to Tartoos. They had just traveled a little when news was received of Caliph Mamoon's death. Till new orders were dispatched, Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal and his honorable companion Muhammad Bin Nuh were sent to prison.

Muhammad Bin Nuh had fallen sick during the course of the travel. His condition deteriorated in prison. The new orders required them to travel to Baghdad where they were to be presented before the new ruler, Caliph Mo'tasim Billah. On the way, Muhammad Bin Nuh succumbed to the illness and died a martyr for the sake of truth.

Now the sole person to continue on this tortuous path was Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal, whose feet were tied in iron chains as he was led to the dungeon of the caliph in the darkness of the night. He spent the whole night supplicating to his Lord, and prostrating and performing prayers. The next day, he was presented before the new caliph.

Mo'tasim himself lacked Islamic knowledge and wisdom so he

blindly followed the will of his deceased brother Mamoon. He too tried to enforce the acceptance of the doctrine of the creation of the Quran across the Islamic empire. A special clause in the deceased's will stated that Qazi Ibne Abi Dawood should be reinstated as the Advisor to the Caliph. This man was a Mutazalite of the first order and he controlled the affairs of the caliphate from the moment he had been appointed the Advisor to Caliph Mamoon. According to some historians, the letters dispatched by Mamoon were actually written by him. When the Caliph fell ill, he apparently convinced him to include this article in the will which continued to give him the same position after the death of Mamoon. Now this same Abu Dawood was comfortably entrenched in the court of Caliph Mo'tasim. In the same court also stood the great scholar of the Shaafai Fiqh, Abu Abdur Rahman Al-Shaafai. There was a hush and strange calm in the gathering as two men had just been beheaded before Imam Hanbal walked in.

The Imam entered the court unperturbed. His eyes swept across the room briefly and then rested on Abu Abdur Rahman. He turned to him and asked, "Do you remember any saying of Imam Shaafai on the topic of Masah (a ritual in ablution)?" The grim situation in the assembly, the presence of the Caliph, the blood seeping from the dead bodies – nothing could faze the Imam. Ibne Abi Dawood screamed in amazement, "Look at this man! His head is about to be chopped off, and yet he is inquiring about an issue of Fiqh!"

Then a dialogue commenced between Caliph Mo'tasim and Imam Hanbal in which the Caliph proved to be no match for the Imam. To the extent that he exclaimed, "Ahmed! If my predecessor (caliph Mamoon) had not arrested you, I would not have confronted you!" Then formal debate started which lasted for three days. The Mutazalite scholars tried to corner the Imam by bulldozing him with dozens of arguments but he refuted every single one of them with clear proofs from

authentic sources. The Imam would insist on arguments based on the Quran and Sunnah. A day later he was thrown back into the dark dungeons of the Caliph. He himself states that looking at the turn of events, he had the premonition that something sinister would happen the next day. He tightened the belt holding his iron footholds and tucked it into his pants fearing that his pajamas might fall down and expose his body depending on the harsh circumstances that he might have to endure. Now the Imam was ready to face whatever treatment his perpetrators might mete out to him in the way of truth. The events that followed are captured in the writings of Abul-Kalam Azad:

"In the last ten days of Ramadan (which are dearer to Allah than any other), Imam Hanbal was made to sit in the hot, burning sun, in a state of fasting. The back that carried the burden of Prophetic knowledge was now at the mercy of a cruel tyrant. Imam Hanbal was severely whipped, with new executioners replacing the old ones after every two lashes. The Imam bore the pain with a smile and stuck fast to the truth for love of Allah and the Prophet's Sunnah. Every strike of the whip brought the same protest on the Imam's lips, 'The Quran is the word of Allah, not His creation'. There was no complaint and no sigh of pain. The whip wielders were all around the Imam and Caliph Mo'tasim Billah himself stood near. He kept telling the Imam that he had greater love and respect for him than his own son. He begged him to admit to the Quran being a creation of Allah so that he could untie the Imam's chains with his own hands. But this embodiment of truth and fountain of prophetic knowledge could only utter these words, 'Show me some proof from the book of Allah, show me an argument from the Prophet's Ahadith and I will admit what you ask me to. I know nothing else besides this.'

The Caliph would helplessly ask Qazi Ibne Abi Dawood and other Mutazalite scholars to debate and argue with Imam

Hanbal. These gentlemen could not find any proofs from the Quran and Sunnah, however hard they tried. Ultimately all their arguments were based on mere reasoning and logic. The Imam would not accept their assertions and kept on demanding evidence from the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW).

When the Caliph ordered his men to start the flogging, there were a few Ahl-e-Sunnah scholars present in the court. They were the ones who had succumbed to the Caliph's new way of thinking and did not have the courage to state their actual views and bear the brunt of their actions. They had the audacity to challenge the Imam on his stance and accused him of being stubborn. They argued that none of his other comrades had acted so rigidly. Imam Hanbal replied that this was no argument and that they should produce something from the Quran and Sunnah. In the state of fasting, which had begun with just a few sips of water, fresh executioners came forward and lashed the Imam with all their might. To the extent that his back smarted with wounds and sores and his blood was dripping all over his body.

After he had been whipped 19 times, Caliph Mo'tasim came to the Imam and asked him why he wanted to lose his life. He claimed to really care about the Imam. He begged him to leave his obstinacy. But a different astonishing state had overcome Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal. Devils in the guise of humans were gnawing at him, torturing him, and a man named Ajeef was constantly prodding him with his sword. He would sneer at the Imam and mockingly ask him whether he wanted to prevail over all those present. Another one would belittle him by pointing out that the Caliph was standing next to him and he had the audacity to disobey the great ruler. One sycophant reminded Caliph Mo'tasim that he was fasting and standing in the heat for so long. Mo'tasim again requested the Imam to give up his views on the state of the Quran. But Imam Hanbal

would only reiterate his previous statement and the Caliph in anger would resort to orders of further flogging. This cruel state of affairs continued…

An eye witness writes that he gently prodded the Imam towards acceptance of the easy way out, since it was Ramadan and the Imam was fasting, and it is permissible to succumb to your enemies under duress. Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal paid not the slightest attention to his words. At one point, when he could not bear the thirst anymore, he asked for water. When water was presented to him, he took the bowl in his hands; he looked at it and then returned the bowl without drinking a sip from it. The condition of the Imam deteriorated and he fell down unconscious on his face.

The Imam himself states that when he regained consciousness, he observed that his iron fetters had been taken off. A few men offered him a drink of water. But he refused because he did not want to break his fast. From there, the Imam was brought to the mansion of Ishaaq Bin Ibrahim. It was time for Zuhr prayers. Ibne Sama'ah led the prayers and the Imam prayed behind him. Ibne Sama'ah was surprised to see the Imam praying while blood was oozing from his wounds. Imam Hanbal explained that he had done the same thing that the Leader of the Faithful, Umar Bin Khattab (RA) had done. He was leading the Fajr prayers when he was attacked by his murderer and in the same state he had completed his prayer.

According to different traditions, Imam Hanbal was held captive and tortured for 18 to 28 months. At last, after the Mutazalite scholars had exhausted all their arguments and inflicted all methods of torture known to them, and still failed to convince or overwhelm the Imam, he was released. Imam Hanbal reached home with his body bruised and battered, and his wounds bleeding. After some time, when he felt strong enough to go to the mosque, he again sat on his old seat to

resume his discourses. Soon after, Caliph Mo'tasim passed away.

We can only pity Mo'tasim for his misfortune and wretchedness that the monumental offense of causing anguish to the leading Imam of his time fell into his lot. Till the Day of Judgment his name will be cast in black ink and he will be defamed for his contemptible treatment of the Imam. On the contrary, this proved to be a source of blessing for Imam Hanbal whose ranks will be elevated in paradise, if Allah so wills, because he bore all the atrocities meted out to him with the utmost fortitude. The truth is that good and bad are only a footstep away from each other. If a person takes a step forward he may be raised up to the level of the highest creation, and if he takes a step backwards, he may sink to the depths of humiliation.

After the death of Mo'tasim the next Caliph was Wasiq. He realized that if he continued to carry out harsh persecution against the Imam, it would intensify the rising support of the masses for the great scholar. Thus, he did not inflict any physical suffering on the Imam but he issued an order to the effect that Ahmed Bin Hanbal would not be able to meet anyone. This house arrest was implemented so stringently that the Imam was not even allowed to step out to the mosque for his prayers. The round of discourses once again was discontinued. This would commence only after the death of Wasiq. After 14 years of persecution and agony, when the Imam sat again in the mosque to resume his study circle, the admiration of the masses had increased tremendously. He now had a massive following who loved him for the extreme sacrifices he had undertaken for the establishment of truth. Regarding this trial, his son speaks out, "My father always used to pray for a particular man. He used to ask for forgiveness for this Abul Haisam. I asked him who this person was. My father replied, "When I was being taken away in chains by the soldiers of the Caliph and also being flogged, I met a man on the way. He said to me, 'Do you

recognize me? I am the famous thug Abul Haisam. My name is listed in the royal prison. If I count the whippings only, I must have endured 18,000 lashes on my back on various occasions. But look at my determination. The moment I am freed I steal again. Listen, how astonishing my steadfastness is in the obedience of Satan. I would therefore be disappointed if a man of your stature broke down in his resolve in the path of Allah.' This advice of Abul Haisam went straight to my heart."

Scholar Par Excellence in Hadith and Fiqh

As long as there is life on earth, Ahmed Bin Hanbal's name will be etched in the echelons of history for his immense contribution to the Science of Hadith. He started the work of compilation of Ahadith in 180 Hijri when he was merely 16 years old. Then on, he dedicated his time to this cause. In his last years, he collected all the numerous writings in one place and divided them into different sections. In this way, they took the shape of a final draft for a book. Then he gathered together his learned sons and a few other esteemed scholars, and dictated to them this immense work which had taken him a lifetime to accumulate. Unfortunately he was not able to give any final shape to his book and death came before he could organize his work into a whole.

By and large, Imam Hanbal was against classifying and arranging the Ahadith compiled by him. But when his son inquired and persisted, he replied, "I have written this book for people's guidance. Whenever there is a conflict regarding the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW), they will refer to this book."

This compilation of the Imam has been given the name Al-Musnad. This book has been penned by his son Imam Abdullah as a narrative from his father. Imam Abdullah also took measures to propagate this work of genius among the Muslim masses. Imam Hanbal would only include in his volume the Ahadith of selected, trusted narrators. Once he related the

method of his selection of Ahadith to his son Abdullah, "O son! You are familiar with my technique of selecting Ahadith that I never contradict any Hadith even though it may be weak, unless I come across a strong authentic Hadith relating to the same matter." Based on this principle, we find in the Musnad both strong and weak Ahadith. Imam Hanbal would discard a weak Hadith from his compilation if he found an authentic Hadith on the same topic contradicting it.

Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal was such an expert in the Science of Ahadith that even his former teacher Imam Shaafai would, at times, refer to him for help and would admit that his knowledge of Ahadith is more profound than Imam Shaafai's.

Imam Hanbal is better known as a scholar of Hadith than an expert on Fiqh, but looking at judgments pronounced by him on various issues confronting Muslims, we can easily deduce that he was a great scholar of Fiqh as well. Although the Imam used to dislike his rulings being copied and noted down. He had the notion that people might become careless regarding the importance of Ahadith if they started concentrating on books with rulings on different issues.

When Imam Hanbal was surrounded by hordes of people who needed help in resolution of contemporary issues, he was forced to pronounce judgments which would aid them in their decision-making. However, he would insist that these rulings were based on need and should not be recorded, printed or propagated. Nor should they be made the basis for future rulings. But his students kept on pressurizing him to relax his stance. Ultimately he agreed to their humble requests to print his verdicts on various issues for distribution among the masses.

The Principles of the Hanbali School of Thought

The Fiqh of Imam Hanbal is based on Ahadith and sayings of the Companions of the Prophet. He did not write any book on

Fiqh nor dictated any topic to his students on Fiqh issues. However, the students of Ahmed Bin Hanbal would write down his pronouncements and get them signed by him for validation.

The Hanbali School of Thought has many distinguishing features but the most striking element is that Imam Hanbal tried his best not to introduce any new concept f his own, but would derive his rulings from the statements of the Companions of the Prophet or a preceding religious scholar. He knew the gravity of introducing something new in religious matters (bidah). Hence we see that most of the rulings issued by the Imam are founded on Ahadith or judgments of the highly esteemed Companions. His knowledge of this area was comprehensive and awe-inspiring. Imam Hanbal would frown upon answering hypothetical questions (about events or situations that have not yet happened).

Another important feature of the Hanbali School is adherence to this guiding standard in the case of Haraam and Halaal: whatever had been declared Haraam by Allah in his book or forbidden by the Prophet (SAW) is Haraam; the rest all falls within the category of Halaal. This principle has given a lot of flexibility to the Hanbali School of Thought.

The Hanbali school not only considers the obvious, apparent aspects of the issue at hand, but it also delves into the causes, objectives and results as well. This praiseworthy trait is less prominent in any other school of law.

To conclude, we can say that although the Hanbali School of Thought is based strictly on Ahadith and rulings of the Companions and those that followed them, yet it is open and flexible to the requirement of the situation.

The Impact of the Hanbali School of Thought

The Hanbali School of Thought was pre-dominantly prevalent

in Iraq in the very beginning. But the rigidity and unyielding attitude of the Hanbali scholars slowed down its progress. In the 4th century Hijri, the Hanbali School made its way into Egypt but the Egyptian rulers were more inclined towards the Shaafai School of Thought. Hence it did not become established there. When the era of the Ayyubi rulers ended in Egypt, this provided an impetus to the spread of the Hanbali Fiqh. Other Muslim countries also had followers of this school but in small numbers. The people of Najad accepted the teachings of this Fiqh at the hands of Imam Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahab in the 18th century and thereafter the Saud clan, the ruling family of Saudi Arabia, firmly established it in the whole of Hijaz. To date, the sovereigns of Saudi Arabia follow this school of thought.

The Lifestyle of Imam Hanbal

Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal was possessed with the desire to acquire knowledge and serve his religion. With such an aim, he obviously required a running income to support his family and religious pursuits. His father had left behind a meager amount and in addition to that he had some shops that he rented out to eke out a living. It was against his nature to accept gifts from people or take favours from them, and he preferred to earn money through hard labour. No work was below his dignity. If he could find no other work, the Imam would carry heavy burdens on his back to earn some income. When things were really looking down, he would resort to sifting from the thrown-away vegetables lying in fields. If this was not possible, Imam Hanbal would take a loan as the last resort and later return it. Quite often, the lender would not wish to take it back, but the Imam would insist as he was an honorable man.

Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal was very stringent and careful about the source of his income. He would ensure that there was no doubt about the legitimacy of the income. He was so hard on

himself that he would not accept a monthly stipend from the ruling governor despite the need, which other scholars would gladly accept. Prior to the trial of the Creation of the Quran, Caliph Mamoon had granted a hefty sum to all the scholars of Hadith and all were known to have accepted the amount according to their need, with the exception of Ahmed Bin Hanbal. He was the only one who did not even glance at the money.

An incident is related in Beehiqi in this regard. Imam Shaafai once mentioned to Caliph Haroon Rasheed that a judge was needed in Yemen. Haroon replied that the Imam was the best person to select a judge. Imam Shaafai agreed to look for a suitable person and brought up the issue with Imam Hanbal, declaring that he did not consider anyone more suitable for the position than Ahmed Bin Hanbal. This was the time when Imam Hanbal was a student of Hadith at Imam Shaafai's school. Imam Hanbal strictly opposed his teacher's suggestion. When he insisted, Imam Hanbal, despite the respect he had for his teacher, replied that if he ever brought up this topic again, he would never find Ahmed Bin Hanbal at his doorsteps.

The caliphates of Mo'tasim and Wasiq were extremely painful for the Imam physically as well as mentally. He did not back off from his position in support of the truth. But when Caliph Mutawakkil assumed the leadership of the Muslim empire, he became a follower of Imam Hanbal. Now a different kind of trial started. He showered the Imam with hordes of gifts and money. The Imam refused to accept money from the treasury. Then he was told to accept the endowment and give it away in charity with his own hands. He refused this offer as well because it was the job of the government to spend from public treasury in charity, and not his.

There came an instance when Imam Hanbal received information that his enemies poisoned the Caliph Mutawakkil

with stories of the Imam being against the caliphate. Once a minister from the court wrote to Imam Hanbal and stated that the Caliph had sent him a sum of money as a gift. And the Imam was required to appear in court before the Caliph to accept a tribute. The minister requested the Imam not to refuse to appear in the presence of the Caliph or return the money. He felt that the enemies of Imam Hanbal would score a victory over him if the Imam denied the order of the Caliph. After receiving this letter, the Imam hesitantly accepted the gift and made his son Swaleh responsible for distributing it among the poor immediately.

At last, the Caliph was convinced of Imam Hanbal's sincerity and piety. Now if anyone would present a case against the Imam he would state that even if Caliph Mo'tasim reappeared from his grave before him with a complaint against Ibne Hanbal he would not believe him. The Caliph now left it to the Imam's discretion to accept or reject his overtures.

Once, on the orders of the Caliph, Imam Hanbal was invited to stay in the royal military camp. Everyday, lavish meals were laid out before him. The Imam's response was to fast on a regular basis and he would open his fast with a mere barley drink which he had kept with him in his travel bag. Because of insufficient nutrition, the Imam became haggard and weak. He also became susceptible to asthmatic attacks. This state of affairs secured him a release from the opulent royal encampment and he was permitted to go back home.

Once his son inquired about his hesitation to use the money sent to him by the Caliph. At this the Imam replied, "Son, I do not believe that accepting gifts from the Caliph is Haraam. But to accept them would be to taint the spirit and piety of one's soul."

In different traditions, we find special mention of two sons of the Imam – Swaleh and Abdullah. Both would stay by their father's side and the Imam would make a conscientious effort

for their education and upbringing. Swaleh remarks that whenever a devout and learned person would visit his father, he would always call his son to meet him. The Imam desired that his son should also be devout and virtuous, and follow the footsteps of these pious people.

The younger son Abdullah was also inclined towards the study of Ahadith since he was a child. The Imam comments on his son, "God has granted special knowledge of the Science of Hadith to my son, such that he reminds me of what I forget."

When the sons of Ahmed Bin Hanbal started to accept the official endowments granted by the Caliph, the Imam tried his best to prevent them. When they refused to agree with him, the Imam said, "Why do you accept this money when the borders of the country are lying vacant and need security, and the booty of war is not being distributed fairly among the poor?"

After this incident Imam Hanbal stopped dining at his sons' houses as he considered this source of wealth to be dubious. His son Swaleh had a big family to support and he was also a generous man. When he was offered the post of a judge in Tartoos, he accepted it and then started to cry, "Allah knows that I would not have accepted this position had I not been in debt and supporting a big family. Nevertheless, I thank God for this opportunity."

Imam Hanbal would not accept even small favours from anyone. His son Swaleh comments, "My honorable father would not even request anyone to get him some water for his ablution. He would himself draw water from the well for his needs."

In personal matters, Imam Hanbal would handle the most difficult of issues with a cheerful countenance and with the utmost patience. Once he differed from an opinion of Imam Abu Haneefa. An irate man who was biased in favour of Imam

Abu Haneefa exclaimed in anger, “The urine of Abu Haneefa is superior to an underling like you!” He left in a spate of fury, then returned and apologized for his atrocious behaviour. He explained that he had unintentionally let off steam and said words that he did not mean. The Imam replied that he had already forgiven him.

The life of Ahmed Bin Hanbal is a praiseworthy example of adherence to the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW). He himself states that he never penned down a Hadith of the Prophet (SAW) that he did not abide by. That is indeed a tall order considering that he recorded thousands of Ahadith.

In addition, Imam Hanbal had a quiet dignity about him and an awe-inspiring personality. The atmosphere in his class was one of respect and deference. His students and other listeners would hesitate to oppose him or argue with him, despite the fact that the Imam did not mind disagreements.

In spite of a noble character and abundant religious knowledge, the Imam was very humble at heart. His modesty was such that he would often say, “I would like to go to Makkah and hide in one of the valleys there so that no one could find me.” Sometimes he would envy the ones whom Allah had not granted fame and distinction. His companion Yahya Bin Mu’een affirms his humility by his statement, “I never came across any person like Ahmed Bin Hanbal. For 50 years I have been associated with him. In this long period, we never saw him demean anyone or show the slightest sign of arrogance.”

How did Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal develop these extraordinary qualities? We can get an insight into his personality by the kind of answers he would give. When someone asked him what is strength and power, the Imam replied, “Forsaking the very thing that you crave for and which is your ultimate desire.” He meant that one should have complete control over one’s desires and animal instincts. This response provides a clue to the resolve

and determination in the Imam's personality. Once a companion of his, Yahya, swore upon God that the Imam had extraordinary strength of character, and that others could not walk on the same path as him.

Death

Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal fell fatally ill at the age of 77 years in 241 Hijri. Crowds of people would throng his house to inquire about his health. The Caliph appointed a guard outside his door and appointed messengers to keep him informed about the Imam's failing health. Ahmed Bin Hanbal died on Friday, the 12th of Rabi-ul-Awwal after remaining ill for nine days.

The entire population of Baghdad wanted to participate in the funeral proceedings. The Imam was wrapped in shrouds made by young innocent girls. All necessary items for his last ablution ritual were purchased from the market. Even the water for bathing was purchased and nothing was taken from his sons' households. The shrouds sent by the governor of Baghdad were politely returned with gratitude. Thus we see that the same level of caution was exercised during his funeral as he would exhibit during his lifetime.

His funeral procession was a true sight to behold. Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children were streaming down the streets of Baghdad. The Imam was laid to rest at Asr time, although the procession had left for the graveyard in the morning. According to traditions, 600,000 to 700,000 mourners participated in the funeral procession.

It is said that this was the biggest funeral procession that Baghdad had ever seen. Mukhtar Masood in his book Avaz-e-Dost *(The Voice of a Friend)* compliments Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal in these words:

"Some people are blessed with such a life that they become

martyrs of honour while still being alive. The people belonging to this tribe are ranked as living martyrs, and their leader's name is Ahmed Bin Hanbal. During the reign of Mamoon he was tied with ropes and chains. During Mo'tasim's era he would be lashed until he passed out, and prodded with a sword to regain consciousness. Wasiq kept him in solitary confinement. When he became old, persecution gave way to such respect and honour that remains fresh in people's heart after a thousand years have passed. When the Day of Judgment comes, it won't be surprising if the forehead glows due to prostration, and the back may become even brighter on account of the lashes he endured. On the same back that rulers use to whip, people happily carry loads of several generations and centuries. Actually, courage is a state of mind and sacrifice is endorsement of this state. Courage is a way of adoption and sacrifice is a way of rejection. If one manages to live through a perfect combination of adoption and rejection, his whole life is considered Jihad and his death is termed martyrdom."

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About the Author

Naima Sohaib, 40, is the author of "Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shaksiat", a 500-page book in Urdu about twenty most prominent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author.

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IMAM BUKHARI

Naima Sohaib

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

This booklet is eighth in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by my good friend Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. It tells us about these unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam. I hope that Muslims today will find their stories a source of inspiration.

The narrative in your hands is about a remarkable Muslim hero from the world of learning. Imam Bukhari was the most eminent scholar of Ahadith. He compiled a book called Sahih Bukhari which is universally acknowledged as the most authentic book after the Quran.

Imam Muhammad Ismail Bukhari was born in Bukhara in 194 A.H. Quite early in life, his intellectual capabilities became noticeable. He traveled to cities far and wide for the compilation and transmission of Ahadith and gained immense knowledge. He had a strong memory and a sharp intellect. He knew 300,000 Ahadith by heart. The Imam was humble, generous, abstentious and had tremendous fear of Allah. He led an exemplary life.

May Allah reward Sana Dossul and Sohaib Umar for the editing, Nadeem Siddiqui for the designing and Asif Misbah, my husband, for his constant encouragement and support.

Eeman Asif Misbah

Imam Bukhari

The Author of the Most Authentic Book after the Quran, and the Greatest Scholar of Ahadith

Introduction

His name was Mohammad, his kuniat Abu Abdullah and the title given to him was Imam-ul-Muhadditheen.

Imam Bukhari was of Zoroastrian descent and his fore-fathers were fire-worshippers. His great grandfather Mughira accepted Islam at the hands of the ruler of Bukhara, soon after which he settled in Bukhara (current Uzbekistan). Imam Bukhari's father Isma'eel was a great scholar of Hadith and he had the fortune of learning from luminaries like Imam Malik and Abdullah Bin Mubarak.

Birth

Mohammad Bin Isma'eel was born on 31 Shawwal on a Friday in 194 Hijri (809 AD) in the city of Bukhara.

Childhood Events

The childhood period of Imam Bukhari cannot be ascertained with authenticity. However, we do know that his parents gave him an excellent environment. His father was not only a qualified scholar of Hadith but also a very cultured and pious man. He was a gardener by profession. He passed away when his son Muhammad (Imam Bukhari) was still a young boy. On his deathbed he stated with conviction that all his wealth had come from legitimate sources.

Imam Bukhari went through another tribulation soon after his father passed away. His eyesight weakened to such an extent that he could hardly see anymore. His mother sought help from medical professionals but there was no improvement in his eyesight. She bowed down before Allah and implored His mercy for her little child. Her heartfelt prayers bore fruit and one night, she saw the Prophet Ibrahim (AS) in her dream. He gave her the good news of the restoration of her son's eyesight as a result of her endless prayers to Allah. The next morning her son could see perfectly well and he never experienced the same problem again. The mother showed her gratefulness to Allah by engaging her son in religious pursuits.

Education and Passion for Ahadith

As a child Mohammad had been gifted with extraordinary intelligence. He completed the memorization of the Quran before the age of ten. Then he developed an interest in the knowledge of Hadith. He himself states that Allah gave him the passion to memorize Ahadith when he was still in school.

At the tender age of eleven, he had acquired so much knowledge of Ahadith that one day he pointed out a mistake of the celebrated scholar of Hadith, Allama Dakhili. The latter was relating the chains of narration of a particular Hadith and he expounded, "Sufyan heard from Abu Zubair who heard from Ibrahim…" The young Mohammad interrupted, "O teacher! Abu Zubair never heard from Ibrahim!" When Allama saw that the objection was being raised by a mere lad, he did not think much of it and scolded the youth for interrupting his class. The adolescent Mohammad was not one to be subdued easily, so he again commented politely, "O teacher! Please consult your original book." Allama Dakhili stood up and went inside to review his work in his primary manuscript. When he returned, he addressed Mohammad and asked him for the correct chain of narration. Mohammad Bukhari stated that Sufyan had heard

from Zubair (and not Abu Zubair). He also added that Zubair was the son of Adi. At this, Allama Dakhili, the eminent scholar, picked up his pen and corrected his mistake.

Imam Bukhari's passion for Ahadith guided him to many great scholars and experts of Ahadith living in his time. Some distinguished names were: Mohammad Bin Salaam, Abdullah Bin Masnadi and Ibrahim Bin Ash'as. The depth of his knowledge often stunned his teachers. Allama Saleem Bin Mujahid relates that once he had gone to visit the renowned scholar of Hadith Muhammad Bin Salaam Baikandi. The latter told him that if he had come earlier, he would have met a boy who knew 70,000 Ahadith by heart. The writer was amazed and went out to look for the boy. When he met Imam Bukhari he asked him to validate the claim that he actually remembered such a vast number of Ahadith. Imam Bukhari amazed him with the answer, "Yes, without doubt, I remember these Ahadith, even more. And not only do I know the Ahadith, but if you question me regarding their narrators, their cities of residence and their major life events, I can recount even those."

It was for this reason that his teacher Mohammad Bin Salaam Baikandi used to exercise extreme caution during the sessions when Imam Bukhari would step into his class; lest he made an error in front of him. This was the level of Imam Bukhari's scholarship when he was merely 16 years old.

Traveling for the Attainment of Knowledge

Scholars of religious pursuits have traditionally undertaken journeys to far-flung areas to widen their horizons and gain different perspectives from different experts. Islamic scholars have typically undergone tiring journeys under stringent conditions in order to fulfill their thirst for knowledge.

Imam Bukhari too decided to embark on a journey in 210 Hijri to follow in the footsteps of his predecessors. He states that

when he had memorized the works of Abdullah Bin Mubarak and Waqi, he decided to travel to Hijaz. He was 16 years old. After performing Hajj with his mother and brother, he stayed back to continue his education while his family returned back. He attended all the study circles established in Makkah and broadened his horizons. Before attaining the age of 18 years, he had authored a book called "The Rulings of the Companions and the Taba'een", which spoke of the remarkable qualities of the Prophet's companions and the decisions taken by them.

Then he proceeded to Madina. He sat besides the grave of the Prophet (SAW) and wrote the book Tareekh-e-Kabeer. This work was mostly accomplished at night in moonlight.

Imam Bukhari's travels continued in order to gain further enlightenment and knowledge of Ahadith. He states, "I undertook journeys to Syria and Egypt twice. I went to Basra four times and Hijaz six times. I also accompanied the scholars of Hadith to Kufa and Baghdad countless times." Besides this, he traveled as far as Khurasan, Ray, Marv, Balkh and Harat. Hence he gained knowledge of Ahadith from various experts by touring the length and breadth of the Islamic empire. Once someone overheard him say, "I have learnt Ahadith from more than a thousand teachers and I never memorized a Hadith without confirming its authenticity."

His Amazing Power of Retention

From childhood onwards, the teachers of Muhammad Bukhari expected a lot from him because of his extraordinary memory, intelligence and hard work. Hashid Bin Isma'eel, a companion of Imam Bukhari, relates that the Imam would travel with them to different schools in Basra but would never pen down anything. A few days later his friends asked him not to waste his time like that. On further insistence, Mohammad Bukhari exclaimed that they were going too far in their persistence. He asked them to recite what they had written. The other students

took out their scrolls and read from their notes. When they had finished, the Imam related many other Ahadith which they had omitted to write in addition to what they had penned down. The companions of Imam Bukhari even corrected their mistakes through his discourse. It is said that Imam Bukhari wrote down all the Ahadith he had learnt in Makkah in the city of Bukhara.

Baghdad was the centre of Islamic scholarship and had more than 800 scholars of Ahadith. When the news of Mohammad Bukhari's phenomenal memory reached Baghdad, the scholars there decided to test him. They decided on a unique method of appraisal. The plan was to pick out a hundred Ahadith and muddle up their chains of narration. These were handed over to ten experts who presented the Ahadith to Imam Bukhari in their incorrect forms. The citizens of Baghdad crowded in to see this unique spectacle. The first man read out the ten Ahadith assigned to him and to each, Muhammad Bukhari replied, "I don't know of this."

In this manner, all ten men put across their Ahadith and again and again, the answer that the Imam gave was, "I don't know of this." Imam Bukhari refused to acknowledge any of these Ahadith. Then the Imam stood up and addressed the first man. First he related the ten Ahadith in the incorrect form exactly as the reciter had narrated, than he recited them correctly with the original chain of narrators. He carried out a similar exercise with all ten gentlemen who had been placed there to test his astounding memory. One by one, he would address them, first apprising them of the fallacious Ahadith and then correcting them. The amazing thing to note was that the Imam had heard the mixed up versions of the Ahadith only once and he remembered the order perfectly. This incident dumbfounded the people of Baghdad and left a lasting impression on their minds.

A similar incident occurred in Samarqand, where the scholars of

Ahadith decided to test the knowledge and retention of Imam Bukhari. They jumbled up the chains of narration of Ahadith from Syria, Iraq, Hijaz and Yemen. This hodgepodge of tampered narrations was presented before Mohammad Bukhari, who did not fail to correct even one Hadith and paired the right text with the right succession of narrators.

It was said of the Imam that when he glanced through a book, he would know it by heart. Imam Bukhari had not only memorized thousands of Ahadith by heart, but he was also an expert in the science of Ahadith. It is extremely difficult and tedious to understand the reasoning and hidden nuances behind the Ahadith. Not every scholar of Ahadith has this competence, which requires memory, understanding and vast knowledge of the science of Hadith. These hidden shades can play a significant role in the acceptance or rejection of Ahadith. The scholar of Hadith needs to know the years of birth and death of the narrators, their occupations, historical incidents, their teachers, their places of residence, the periods of their interaction with various teachers, etc. They have to study the variations of the same Hadith through different chains of narrators, the actual text as conveyed by each narrator and an overall comprehension of the entire collection of Ahadith.

That Imam Bukhari was an authority in Ahadith and its related disciplines can be judged by the fact that Imam Muslim would visit him as a student to gain more insight into the various sciences of Ahadith. Imam Tirmizi has presented a comprehensive discourse on the authenticity of Ahadith in his book, “The Tirmizi Compilation”. He states, “In this book the majority of the reasoning and nuances of Ahadith, the historical facts and the commentary on the narrators of Ahadith have been obtained from the books of Imam Bukhari. In addition, most of the bases of Ahadith were personally taken down first hand during his lectures.”

History of Compilation of Ahadith and the Fabrication of Ahadith

It would be appropriate to delve into an account of the earliest collections of Ahadith before we go into details of the eternally beneficial work of Imam Bukhari – *The Sahih Bukhari*.

We all acknowledge the fact that the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) had the deepest regard and love for him. They would rush to carry out his slightest command and would emulate his every action. During the early years of prophethood, the Companions made an attempt to write down some of his sayings, but the Prophet (SAW) did not give his approval. He might have been apprehensive that the words of the Quran and Ahadith would get mixed up. Hence we find the Prophet's instructions to this effect in Sahih Muslim, "If anyone has written down the words I utter besides the Quran, he should erase them."

The Beginning of Compilation of Ahadith during the Life of the Prophet (SAW)

In the later years at Madina, when the Companions were sufficiently groomed, and there was no fear of the Quran and Hadith getting intermingled, the Prophet (SAW) not only allowed the Companions to pen down the Ahadith but also encouraged it. In this regard, he supported their effort by adding, "May Allah keep fresh and happy the person who listened to my words and then saved them. Then he conveyed them to the one who had not heard them."

At the same time, the Prophet (SAW) asked his Companions to exercise utmost caution in recording the Ahadith. He stated, "Hell is the abode of the one who attributed something to me which I did not utter." He further added that the person to whom a query regarding religion is directed and who hides the piece of knowledge regarding it (of which he is aware) will be

strapped to a rein of fire in Hell.

In the light of all these statements, the Companions became extremely vigilant in matters of reporting and recording Ahadith. If they were questioned regarding an issue, and were aware of any ruling of the Prophet (SAW) concerning it, they would not hesitate to share the information. But the documentation of Ahadith was not very common during the lifetime of the Prophet (SAW); for the simple reason that he present himself. Whenever a new problem occurred, it was referred to him. Also, the Arabs had a startling memory and they thought it beneath their dignity to write down something when they could remember it so well. It is fascinating that they could relate the geneology of their horses. Most of the Arabs were illiterate. In spite of this, we find occasions during the Prophet's time when Ahadith were documented.

Tirmidhi relates an incident which seems to belong to a period marking the start of the documentation of Ahadith. A man came to the Prophet (SAW) and said, "What you say is extremely important but my memory is weak and I often forget, so what should I do?" The Prophet (SAW) advised that he should make use of his right hand (meaning he should write them down). Later Abdullah Bin Amr Bin Aas, a young seventeen year old Companion of the Prophet who had exceptional intelligence and possessed a keen desire to seek knowledge, decided to take advantage of this permission and began to record everything the Prophet (SAW) articulated. Some people disapproved of this act and remarked that the Prophet (SAW) was only human; sometimes he could be angry and it may not be correct to write what he says during this condition. Abdullah Bin Amr (RA) mentioned these comments to the Prophet (SAW) who answered, "By the one to whom my life belongs, nothing escapes from my lips but the truth, so continue to write."

According to certain traditions, Abdullah Bin Amr Bin Aas organized a collection of Ahadith called "The Truthful Collection". It contained about 10,000 Ahadith. Similarly, Anas (RA), who was a special servant of the Prophet (SAW) and spent nine years in his company, compiled a number of Ahadith and even got them verified by the Prophet (SAW) by reading it out to him. Likewise, another collection of Ahadith is attributed to Ali Bin Abi Talib (RA), who guarded it zealously after the death of the Prophet (SAW) and would often quote from it on occasions. These were the personal efforts of the Companions. The formal letters, pacts, orders and other communications of the Prophet (SAW) were preserved and can be found in various museums all over the Muslim world.

The Companions' Endeavors after the Prophet's Death

After the Prophet (SAW) passed away, many of his Companions made attempts to record his sayings. If they had not endeavoured to do this, this important heritage would have dwindled away and we would have lost a whole treasure of religious knowledge and application. Hence Samrah Bin Jundub, Abdullah Bin Masood, Saad Bin Ubaadah, Abdullah Bin Abbas, and Abu Huraira (RA) all worked on compilations of Ahadith. The Prophet's eminent companion, Abu Bakr Siddique (RA) also prepared a collection of 1500 Ahadith after the death of the Prophet (SAW). He handed it over to Ayesha (RA), his daughter for safekeeping. The following night, he could not sleep a wink and went to see Ayesha (RA) in the morning, requesting her to hand him back the compilation. He was apprehensive that he might have attributed something to the Prophet that he did not utter. When she brought out the document, he erased it with water.

Likewise, Umar Bin Khattab (RA) also decided to record Ahadith of the Prophet (SAW). But he was held back by the thought that people might start ignoring the Quran in favour of

Ahadith. Both these renowned Companions were extremely cautious in the matter of Ahadith because to them it was no ordinary matter. In all matters individual and collective, they referred to the Ahadith as the next authentic source of knowledge after the Quran. In the time of his caliphate, if someone presented a new Hadith which was unknown to Umar, the Caliph would seek witnesses to verify and support it. Abdullah Bin Masood (RA) was a frequent visitor to the Prophet's house. He would tremble with trepidation whenever he would utter the words, "And the Prophet (SAW) said…." Then he would add "something like this" and other words to this effect so that he would not be held accountable for any small error on his part. Some of the Companions of the Prophet abandoned the practice of relating and recording Ahadith in their old age for fear of making a mistake due to weak memory.

Only an ignorant person would deduce that the Companions of the Prophet were negligent in recording Ahadith or that they could have made mistakes because of heedlessness. The Companions not only understood and remembered the sayings of the Prophet (SAW) but also recalled his actions and comprehended his body language. Once a man asked Khabaab (RA) if the Prophet (SAW) would recite the Quran in the afternoon prayers. Khabaab answered in the affirmative. When people asked him how he knew this, he replied that he figured out from the movement of the Prophet's beard that he was reciting. (It must be mentioned that in congregational afternoon prayers of Zuhr and Asr the recitation by the Imam is silent while in the remaining three prayers it is loud).

Likewise, Abdullah (RA) while explaining the process of prayer stated that he could see the movement of the Prophet's fingers during the prayer.

The Companions of the Prophet settled in various conquered territories of the Muslim empire in order to propagate the

teachings of Islam. Abu Darda Kholani states that when he entered a mosque in Hums, he glimpsed a group of 32 Companions whom he joined. One of the Companions would end his sermon and the other would start in order to educate the new converts. Similarly, Huzaifa Bin Yaman (RA) would teach in the city of Kufa and Abu Darda (RA) would disseminate religious knowledge in Damascus. Both had huge followings. Jabir Bin Abdullah (RA) would lecture in the Mosque of the Prophet (SAW) in Madina. Abuzar Ghaffari (RA) declared that if a sword was placed on his neck, and he knew that he could utter one more word that he had learnt from the Prophet (SAW), he would articulate that word before the sword finished him off.

The famous Companion of the Prophet Abu Huraira (RA) was much sought after for the learning of Ahadith as he related the highest number of Ahadith. He was typically surrounded by students in great multitudes. When Abu Saeed Khudri (RA) would start relating Ahadith, he would be crowded by eager pupils. A large number of students, both men and women, benefited from the vast fountain of religious knowledge of Ayesha (RA), the Mother of the Believers.

During the lifetime of the Companions of the Prophet, they sincerely and wholeheartedly dispensed and propagated the true religion as they had learnt from the Prophet (SAW) directly. Thus it can be concluded that:

- The Companions of the Prophet did whatever was humanly possible to preserve and record the sayings and the actions of the Messenger of Allah.

- There is no logical reason to doubt the authenticity of Ahadith after looking at their efforts to preserve, memorize and reproduce the words of the Prophet (SAW).

- During the era of the Companions, the recording of Ahadith took place at a large scale. Many eminent Companions had

their own collections of Ahadith. However, they were very cautious in this regard. Memorising Ahadith by heart was more common.

The Fabrication of Ahadith

If matters had stopped here, the history of Ahadith would have indeed been short. After the death of the second Caliph Umar (RA), certain shady and hostile elements reared their ugly head during the caliphate of Usman (RA). Their leader was Ibne Saba who was of Jewish descent and had reverted to Islam. He originated from Yemen. His mind was constantly devising devious schemes in order to create dissension in the Muslim society. He had gathered around him a number of hypocrites who were insincere Muslims and together they targeted the characters of the Companions of the Prophet (SAW).

Ibne Saba recognized the fact that the compilation of the Quran had taken place and all the Muslims were in agreement on this issue, so the seeds of doubt could not be planted regarding the words of the Quran. Hence he aimed at tarnishing the image of the Companions' persona in the minds of the Muslims. He presented some of them as superior and accused and insulted others. He tried to pitch them against each other.

He accused eminent Companions of the Prophet like Abu Bakr and Umar of working against the directives of the Prophet (SAW). He further blamed other Companions for joining hands with the former. His misleading arguments were heard by a lot of people in different cities that Ibne Saba visited one after the other. He was expelled from each metropolis after poisoning the masses with his deceptive talk. After being driven out from Basra and Kufa, he entered Egypt. The distressing fact is that he left a trail of miscreants in each city that he departed from. The majority of these dissidents were Bedouin Arabs who settled in the newly conquered territories of the Muslim empire. After the death of many Companions of the Prophet, their native

treacherous nature was rising to the surface again. The ones who fell prey to this slanderous talk were mostly from these ignorant and weak-charactered tribes. They became suspicious about the pure intentions of the Companions and began to stir the masses against them. The average Arab person was simple yet knew the difference between truth and falsehood. Hence to lend veracity to their accusations, they initiated the process of fabrication of Ahadith.

On the political front, Usman (RA) was a lenient and soft-hearted Caliph. Taking advantage of his clemency, the miscreants raised up a storm of dissension among the masses. The Caliph was house-bound and then murdered and the fabricators of Ahadith intermingled with the army of Ali (RA), the new caliph, so well that they could not be identified. These mischief mongers would ascribe to the Prophet (SAW) as they saw fit. Such transgression was bound to be noticed and Ali came to know what Ibne Saba and his supporters were up to. The Caliph announced that such malefactors would be whipped as punishment. Then he called Ibne Saba and reprimanded him for his evil designs. He publicly denied the pronouncement that he had been granted access to special knowledge by the Prophet (SAW), as claimed by Ibne Saba. When he did not get dissuaded from his malevolent plans, Ali (RA) stated on his face that Ibne Saba was one of the thirty Dajjals who the Muslims had been warned about in a Hadith.

Ultimately Ibne Saba was banished from Kufa. Hafiz Ibne Hajr writes that Ali (RA) burnt these trouble-makers during his caliphate. Unfortunately, the poison injected by these fabricators of Ahadith had penetrated deep within the Muslim empire. The majority of the masses started using these invented Ahadith with ease and confidence as though they were really the words of the Prophet (SAW) as related by his Companions. Many of the righteous started ignoring the importance of Ahadith because the authentic could not be easily separated

from the fabricated. People became confused and became so cautious in quoting or listening to Ahadith that they preferred to stay away from them and considered the Quran to be sufficient. This was an appalling state of affairs. In the wake of false Ahadith, the real Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) was significantly declining in importance. After dealing with the mischief makers, Ali (RA) felt a profound need to reinstate the worth of Ahadith. He stated that a man should pay the utmost attention to a Hadith, because it was a source of true direction and the best piece of guidance, guaranteeing righteousness and piety.

The next step that he took was to present a clear picture of the sayings of the Prophet (SAW) to deal with this intolerable situation. He tried to separate truth from falsehood. Once Ali announced at the pulpit, "Who will purchase a treasure of knowledge from me at a mere cost of one dirham?" Then he would dictate Ahadith while others would write. Ali would catch hold of people and would insist that they ask him regarding religious matters so that he could clarify truth from falsehood.

Those who maligned the reputations of the noble Companions of the Prophet were severely criticized by Ali (RA). He berated them and beseeched Allah to destroy these elements who had defiled the high status of Companions and distorted the words of the Prophet (SAW). To dilute the impact of these negative forces, he would advise the people to stick to those matters in religion which were clear to them and to stay away from dubious statements attributed to the Prophet (SAW).

The Role of Various Factions in Distortion of Ahadith

Ali, Ibn Abbas and other eminent Companions of the Prophet were constantly involved in the separation of truth from falsehood. Amid their untiring efforts, an unfortunate event occurred. Ali was assassinated and martyred by a miscreant

while summoning the Muslims for Fajr prayers. Now the field was clear for the trouble-makers who identified the simplest and weak-minded of Ali's supporters in order to inundate them with false Ahadith regarding the stature of Ali. They also made up Ahadith and attributed them to Ali (RA), although he had nothing to do with them. The blind followers of Ali started believing these Ahadith and accorded to them a status close to revelation.

At this juncture, the next generation of dedicated scholars, the Taba'een, stepped up to clarify the status and importance of Ahadith. But the matter had spun out of control. Now it was not just the Sabba'ites (followers of Ibne Saba) who were fabricating and distorting Ahadith; they were joined in this heinous activity by sycophants, story-tellers, Rawafiz (staunch supporters of Ali), Kharajites, hence anyone and everyone who had an ulterior motive stepped in to warp the wordings uttered by the Messenger of Allah.

The faction of Zanadaqa concocted 14,000 Ahadith. Fortunately, the masses were forewarned of their wicked tendencies, hence they were not attracted to this group. Some story-tellers formulated interesting tales interwoven with fabricated Ahadith in order to gain popularity among the Muslim masses; they were nominated to speak at the mosques instead of religious scholars. People were attracted to these story-tellers because they concocted fascinating stories. A scholar of Hadith Ibne Aun relates that hardly a handful of students could be found listening to eminent scholars in Kufa, while the masses thronged to listen to these story-tellers in great multitudes.

During the Umayyad Dynasty, several formulators of Ahadith rose to prominence. They would not hesitate to distort the words of the Prophet (SAW) in order to please the ruling party or the Sultans. This practice continued for a while. We find an

incident where Ghias Bin Ibrahim entered into the court of Caliph Mehdi, where a tamed pigeon was entertaining the Caliph. Ghias was asked to relate a Hadith of the Prophet (SAW). He at once made up a Hadith that Rasool Allah (SAW) had said that competition was permissible only in partridges, horses, camels and birds. After Ghias left the royal palace, Caliph Mehdi told those present that he was quite sure that the former had fabricated this Hadith just to please him. He then proceeded to slaughter the pidgeon.

Similarly, some foolish people who had gained religious knowledge concocted Ahadith to place fear in people's heart. When they were questioned for their act, they merely replied that fear would make the masses more pious and increase them in devotion.

In this regard, Ibne Jozi, a scholar of Ahadith, quotes an incident. Once Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal and Yahya Bin Mu'een stopped by a mosque for prayers. After the prayer was over, a preacher stood up to deliver a Hadith. He quoted Ahmed Bin Hanbal and Yahya Bin Mu'een and claimed to have heard the Hadith from them who heard from Adbur-Razzak who heard from Muammar who heard from Qatada who heard from Anas (RA). According to the Hadith, the Prophet (SAW) said that whoever says *La Ilaha Illallah*, Allah creates for him a bird for every letter that he utters. The beak of the bird is made of gold and its wings are made of pearls. The preacher continued to exaggerate on this topic at great length.

Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal and Yahya Bin Mu'een who were present in the audience looked at each other in astonishment. They confirmed that neither had heard of this Hadith attributed to them. They called the preacher and he came over readily, thinking that he would be rewarded with a gift. Yahya asked him who had related this Hadith to him. He again took their names. When they identified themselves as Ahmed and Yahya,

proclaiming that they had never heard this Hadith, the preacher confidently replied that he had heard that Yayha was a foolish person and today it was proven true. He continued that there could be other Yahyas and Ahmeds besides them and that he has narrated Ahadith from 17 Ahmeds and Yayhas. He left the place mocking at these two, instead of being shameful for his abominable act.

Efforts of Taba'een and Taba Tab'een in Compilation of Ahadith

No efforts were spared in the 2nd Hijri for the collection of Ahadith by the scholars of Islam. They traveled far and wide from one end of the Islamic empire to another for this purpose. A concern arose about the authenticity of Ahadith and the issue of sifting and grading them. The Taba'een who had benefited from the company of the Companions of the Prophet were gradually leaving the world. The vast conquests of the Muslims had brought in new languages, and the Arabic text, its meaning and idiom were changing or would often be handled differently by Muslims of various regions.

After the demise of the Taba'een, the Taba Taba'een worked in earnest to compile the Ahadith. At the government level, there were individuals like Umar Bin Abdul Aziz who ordered a compilation of Ahadith to be prepared. In Madina, the famous Mautah was written by Imam Malik. Ibne Jareej in Makkah, Imam Auzai in Syria, Sufyan Soori in Kufa, Hammad Bin Salmah in Basra were scholars who served and supplemented with their efforts the elementary subject of Ahadith. Now people started to memorize Ahadith in the thousands, and the recording of Prophetic sayings became more common. History books are full of accounts of the immense devotion exhibited by the scholars of Ahadith towards their subject. It was not unusual for a scholar to journey for days and travel hundreds of miles just to verify a Hadith.

The Science of Ahadith – the Unparalleled Achievement of Muslims

The study of Ahadith became a proper science. For a scholar of Hadith, it was crucial to learn the chains of relation and the text of the Ahadith, as well as the biography and character of the narrators of Ahadith. The *Biography of Narrators* (Asma ur Rijaal) contained the names of countless narrators and would include accounts of their condition, culture, manners, habits and dealings with others. These narrators were minutely examined and had to pass several criteria before being accepted as genuine.

Dr. Springer writes, "No nation has lived on this earth or exists today to produce a work of greater genius than the biography of narrators of Ahadith. Through it we get to learn about the complete life histories of 500,000 personalities."

All these efforts in the compilation of genuine Ahadith helped stop the damage done by the fabricators of Ahadith. An example will clarify this point. The Jews of Khaibar presented a document in the Caliph's court and stated that the Prophet (SAW) had dictated it. According to it, the Jews of Khaibar were exempted from forced labor and Jizya (tax levied on Non-Muslims in return for the protection offered).

The court ministers showed the document to the scholars of Ahadith before arriving at any decision. The scholars rejected the authenticity of this document by stating the following proofs:

- The document was witnessed by Saad Bin Ma'az – who had passed away before the Battle of Khaibar took place.
- The document was written by Muawiya Bin Abi Sufyan – who had not embraced Islam at the time.

- Taxes like Jizya can be waived for friends of Islam while the Jews of Khaibar were enemies of Muslims.

- Forced labor was not practiced during the lifetime of the Prophet (SAW) so there was no question of it being waived.

- Most important of all, the Quranic order of Jizya had yet not been revealed.

Hence the fallacious account of the Jews was rejected on the basis of these strong arguments.

In those days, many talented and dedicated scholars presented their collections of Ahadith. A few among them were Ahmed bin Hanbal, Usman Bin Abi Shaiba, and Ishaq Bin Rahwia. Due to their efforts, the Muslim Ummah was blessed with a vast treasure of Ahadith.

The scholars of Ahadith went on to establish definitive standards for the acceptance of Ahadith. Also deemed crucial was the life account and character of the narrators. A critical analysis of the text of various Ahadith was also considered. The Muslim Ummah needed to have a sound and tested compilation of Ahadith which could be adhered to without any doubt; a definite treasure of Ahadith which would be pure from weak and fabricated words attributed to the Prophet (SAW) – a work that could be used by the common man in addition to the scholars.

Sahih Bukhari – the Most Authentic Book after the Quran

We have mentioned the emotional attachment and respect that Imam Bukhari had for the words of the Prophet (SAW). He was well-acquainted with all the existing collections of Ahadith. He could see the different strong and weak traditions present in these compilations. Imam Bukhari would always feel the

presence of a gap. One day, when he was in the company of Imam Ishaq Bin Rahwiya, the latter expressed a desire that Imam Bukhari should compile a book of authentic Ahadith of the Prophet (SAW) from the entire collection of Ahadith.

Imam Bukhari says that his words left a deep impression on his heart and provided the fuel that fired his imagination. He wasted no time in the start of a new journey towards the collection of authentic Ahadith. Later, he dreamt that he was fanning the Prophet (SAW) and dispersing the flies surrounding him. When he sought the interpretation of his dream, he was told that he would dispel the dark clouds over the Prophet (SAW), referring to the lies and fabricated Ahadiths. This vision of the Messenger further strengthened his resolve to undertake the task of a most authentic collection of Ahadith.

This task was going to be no ordinary undertaking. The past era had seen a great upsurge in the fabrication of Ahadith. A few individuals are credited for making up thousands of Ahadith. A man called Abdullah Karim Wadah once boasted that he had concocted 4,000 Ahadith.

In these tough circumstances, Imam Bukhari gathered his courage and determination for this uphill assignment. He would investigate each Hadith and when he was convinced of its authenticity, he would offer the prayer of Istikhara (to seek guidance from Allah). Only then he would include the Hadith in his book.

His passion for his work has been described by Wariq who happened to be with the Imam when he was writing the chapter on Tafseer. He relates that Imam Bukhari would get up 15 to 20 times in the night, light the oil lamp, mark certain Ahadith and then again retire for a little while. The writer urged the Imam to wake him up to light the lamp but the Imam insisted on doing it himself since he didn't want to disturb the sleep of the young man.

Inspite of being cautious to the limit, he would still beseech Allah to grant him the ability to undertake this great endeavour. The Imam states that he had not included any Hadith in the book until he had offered two rakats of prayer for it. A section of this work was completed in the Masjid-e-Haram. It was completed after 18 years of exhaustive hard work and dedication. When he decided to divide the whole volume into subject-wise chapters, he proceeded to Madina and continued the process in the place between the grave of the Prophet (SAW) and his pulpit. Every time he would come to a new subject, he would pray two nafils of prayer. When he had sifted through 600,000 Ahadith, he presented the final collection to esteemed scholars like Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal, Yahya Bin Mu'een and Ali Al-Madaini. They expressed deep admiration for the collection of Ahadith and appreciated its authenticity. They only investigated about four Ahadith.

The *Sahih Bukhari* became a prestigious and much sought after book while Imam Bukhari was alive and he personally recited it directly to 90,000 students. Sahih Bukhari is credited as the second most authentic book after the Quran. Imam Bukhari also happened to write other books, but unfortunately they are not available to us today.

The Uniqueness of Sahih Bukhari

We would like to discuss why Sahih Bukhari is classified as the most authentic book after the Quran.

In the Sahih Bukhari we find Ahadith that go back to the Prophet (SAW) via only three chains of narrators. Such Ahadith are called *Salasiat.*

Imam Mohammad Bukhari was the first to undertake the gigantic task of recording only genuine Ahadith. For this purpose, he went through 600,000 Ahadith and picked out only 4,000 as most reliable. If we include the Ahadith repeated

through different chains, we still come to a figure of only 7,275.

Imam Bukhari paid the utmost attention to the historical accounts of the narrators. He had to separate the bona fide from the insincere, and this was no easy task. He was careful in his choice of words for the narrators. He would never use harsh words in his criticism of reporters of Ahadith, like liar or fabricator. Occasionally we do find some narrators being labeled as *Munkar-i-Hadith* (Deniers of Hadith) and that meant that it was not acceptable to relate Ahadith from them. He was particular about the character of each reporter of Ahadith. Once the Imam traveled far and wide to investigate the state of a Hadith. When he reached the concerned narrator, the person was pretending that he had some fodder for his horse so that the animal would come to him. When the horse came closer he shrugged his shoulders and straightened up. The Imam decided to turn back then and there because a man who could fool his horse could also deceive men.

Sahih Bukhari is a unique book recited directly by Imam Bukhari in front of 90,000 students. What an amazing chain of narration it has! Imam Najamuddin who wrote an explanation of Sahih Bukhari proudly claims that he can trace 50 links to Imam Bukhari through various teachers. Very few old books besides the Quran can claim to be in a completely authentic and untouched state to this day, and Sahih Bukhari is one of them. To the extent that no doubt has ever been cast on its originality.

While Imam Bukhari tried his utmost best to select the most authentic Ahadith for his book, he also kept in mind the derivation of Fiqh issues from these Ahadith. If one Hadith provides the answer to multiple issues, the same has been noted under different headings. The Imam would first state the Quranic verses dealing with a particular topic and then the related Ahadith. Thus we see that Sahih Bukhari besides being an authentic collection of Ahadith is also a source of guidance

in issues of Fiqh.

To be included in the Sahih, a Hadith had to pass very stringent conditions. The chain of reporters from top to bottom had to consist of narrators who were by and large acceptable to scholars of Ahadith. They had to be Muslim, truthful, reputable, had to possess strong memories, be of sound mind, possess clarity of thought and hold sound Islamic beliefs.

The Hadith had to have an unbroken chain of narrators. It had to be accepted by the eminent scholars of the previous generation. The relaters of Ahadith had to be A-grade; average or low-grade narrators were not included. The A-grade scholars had a phenomenal memory and sound Islamic beliefs; they had to have spent a considerable length of time attached to each of their Sheikhs in order to recognize the Ahadith of their teachers easily.

These are the qualities that single out Sahih Bukhari from other Islamic literature. To date, dozens of explanations of Sahih Bukhari have been written and the scholars have left no aspect of it untouched. Some have commented on its linguistic aspect while others have argued about its narrators. Yet others have tried to summarize it. Today in the Islamic world, we find the Muslims divided into diverse sects, but this book has cut its way into the hearts of Muslims all over the globe and has found universal acceptance because of its authenticity. Whether it is a scholar of Ahadith or Fiqh, a philosopher or a Sufi saint, all turn to the Sahih for spiritual guidance as they are dependant on the sayings of the Prophet (SAW). Centuries have passed but this volume seems as popular as ever. The greatest work of Imam Bukhari has influenced and benefited tens of millions of Muslims throughout the ages. What did the Imam think of his masterpiece? He remarked once, “I have created this book as a salvation for my soul.”

The Eminent Students

Imam Bukhari was blessed with talented and dedicated students who rank among the top scholars of Ahadith and whose books were included among the six most authentic books of Hadith. Imam Muslim, Imam Nisai and Imam Tirmidhi were all students of Imam Bukhari. Imam Muslim was inspired by Sahih Bukhari when he ventured to create a similar piece of work, *Sahih Muslim*. It is regarded as the next most authentic book after Sahih Bukhari. Imam Muslim verifies that Imam Muhammad Bukhari was unique in his abilities and endowments. He would call his teacher Syed-ul-Muhadditheen (The Leader of the Hadith Scholars).

Imam Tirmidhi also mentions that in his work of genius, *Jamay Tirmidhi*, most of the rationales behind Ahadith, the commentary on the narrators and discussion on important issues have been inspired and influenced by Imam Bukhari, most of which he directly imbibed from his great teacher. Besides these famous Imams, Imam Darmi and Imam Ibne Khuzaima also benefited from Imam Bukhari.

These were the more well-known students whose names are known and recorded in history. The students of Ahadith and others were so eager and anxious to learn from the Imam that they would get hold of the Imam while he would walk down the street and start writing Ahadith. Lo and behold! Their number would reach thousands.

Opposition and Trial

Imam Muhammad Bukhari would avoid the company of the governors and the elite – the ruling gentry. He firmly disliked the adulation and flattery meted out to those in command. He would say, “Knowledge is debased in the company of the elite, and their adulation leads to the corruption of religion.”

After completing the historic *Sahih Bukhari*, the Imam returned to his native city of Bukhara. These were times when the whole Muslim empire was raving over his immense contribution. To welcome him, the locals had lined the streets for three miles outside the city. Rich and poor, elite and common, all wanted to catch a glimpse of the great scholar.

After settling down in Bukhara, the Imam started his Hadith lectures. Groups of students would flock to his house to benefit from his knowledge. The ruler of Bukhara decided to summon the Imam to teach him. Unfortunately, he did not recognize the value of knowledge. He ordered the Imam to come with his book and recite the Ahadith to him. The Imam refused to oblige – stating that he could not debase true knowledge and would not knock on the door of the ruling elite. He further announced that he was not one to hide knowledge. If the governor wanted to learn Ahadith he had to come to the mosque or to the Imam's house. There was no way that he would preach to only the privileged and ignore the under-privileged.

The governor of Bukhara was extremely displeased with the Imam's reply. He sent him another request to set aside special timings for the coaching of the princes in religious matters at the Imam's own residence or at the mosque. The Imam answered, "This is the inheritance of the Prophet (SAW). All people, whether rich or poor, have equal right to acquire it. The doors of my mosque and school are open to all. Whoever is interested should enter and receive knowledge. No one will be barred from it."

This response was received with a heavy heart and it angered the governor. He decided to get even with Imam Bukhari and started plotting against him. He assigned a few people to accumulate evidence against the Imam in order to malign him. The Imam was accused of issuing incorrect rulings and of holding the erroneous belief that the Quran was the creation of

Allah. This wrong notion was publicized and the Imam was ordered to leave the city of Bukhara. When Imam Bukhari left the city, he cursed those who had placed false blame on him, "O Allah! Afflict them with what they intended for me and their offspring." Hardly a month went by when the Caliph sent dismissal orders for the governor of Bukhara, who was made to ride out in public on a donkey and was finally imprisoned. The rest of the conspirators also suffered a dreadful fate regarding either their lives, properties or offspring.

Imam Bukhari proceeded to Baikund. But he was not well-received in this city. He then received a request from the people of Samarqand beseeching him to benefit them with his immense knowledge. He accepted their appeal and left for Samarqand. He reached the home of a relative close to the city. After a few days, he fell sick. The natives of Samarqand continued to send messages to the Imam, imploring him to come to them. Imam Bukhari decided to travel further despite his illness. But soon he received the news that the people of Samarqand were also divided; some supported the Imam while others were against him. This report saddened the Imam and he supplicated to Allah in the hours of the night, "Oh Allah! Your earth is wide but it has become constricted for me. Allow me to return to you." His prayers were answered as usual and he was soon to leave the world.

Death

In this state, another message reached him with the information that the people of Samarqand had united in their stance and were eagerly awaiting him. Imam Bukhari summoned a horse and started his journey onwards. Two men were needed to support him and walked him towards the mount. He had hardly walked a little, when he asked to be released and raised up his hands to pray. Then he lay down and was drenched in sweat. He passed away on the day of Eid, 256 Hijri at the age of 62

years.

The funeral prayers were led for him in Khartang after Zuhr prayers. After he was buried, his grave emitted a strong fragrance, better than musk. This news traveled far and wide and masses thronged to his grave to witness the phenomenon. They would carry some soil with them. The residents of the place sealed the grave because they were scared that no mud would be left if the situation was left uncontrolled.

Personality and Character

Imam Muhammad Bukhari had received a sizable inheritance at the death of his father. This was the money about which his father had sworn that it was completely earned through halal means. Imam Bukhari invested this whole amount in trade. This way, he continued to focus solely on religious education. The profit gained from this trade was spent on students and scholarly persons.

The Imam was cautious not to let the love for money enter his heart. Once a group of traders offered 5,000 dirhams to him for some goods. He promised to let them know the answer the next day. Next morning another group of merchants offered to pay double for the same amount of goods. The Imam refused on the pretext that he had made the intention the previous night to deal with the first group of traders. He did not like to break his intention. It must be borne in mind that the Imam had not yet made the commitment but still he did not go for a higher profit. This was actually an act of purification of the heart. He endeavoured to keep his heart free of diseases like greed.

The Imam was not always in a good financial position. As a student, he saw some tough times. Once while traveling, he ran out of funds and had to survive on grass and leaves for several days. He preferred starving rather than asking others for help. Once in Basra, he ran out of money, so he decided to sell his

clothes. When fellow students inquired about his absence from the class, they discovered that he had sold everything he owned but would not reveal his condition out of self-respect.

Imam Bukhari was careful to abide by the Sunnah as much as he could. He opened an inn for travelers outside Bukhara. Along with other labourers and masons, he would carry bricks for its construction. A student protested against his hard labour. The Imam replied that this deed would definitely benefit him. He hinted towards the Battle of the Trench in which the Prophet (SAW) himself had helped out in the digging of the trench around Madina.

The Imam learnt the skill of archery just because the Prophet (SAW) had emphasized its importance. He would go out and practice his shooting of arrows in a ground. This was an unheard of practice for a scholar. Imam Bukhari would exercise caution even in small matters like all great scholars. Once while practicing archery, an arrow hit a bridge and damaged a part of it. He at once proceeded to the bridge to inspect the damage, took his arrow out and asked his companion to go to the owner of the bridge in order to determine the amount needed to repair or reconstruct it. The owner, himself an admirer of Imam Bukhari, did not want any compensation and commented that it would be an honour to sacrifice all his belongings for the Imam. On hearing this, the Imam was appeased and he gave 100 dirhams in charity.

Imam Muhammad Bukhari would display the same vigilance with the use of his tongue. He himself states, “Since I have found out that backbiting is haram, I have not bad-mouthed anyone and I am hopeful that no claimant will stand up against me in this regard on the Day of Judgment.” It would be worthwhile to mention a little incident here. Once he asked a man called Abu Maashar to forgive him. The man was surprised and asked him the reason for the forgiveness. The

Imam replied, “Once I saw you wave your hands and jerk your head in a weird manner out of happiness and excitement, and I laughed at you.” Abu Maashar could not believe his ears at the guilt the Imam felt at such a small act and he prayed that Allah have mercy on him.

This extraordinary carefulness was the cause behind his unblemished personality. He recognized his esteemed status as a scholar and propagator of prophetic knowledge and wisdom. He realized that a slip on his part could ruin the work of a lifetime. If the masses started doubting his intentions this could create misgivings about his work.

History tells us an incident regarding this. Imam Bukhari once traveled by boat in pursuit of knowledge. This was at a time when he was aiming to seek higher religious education. The Imam had a bag containing 1,000 gold coins. He revealed this to a fellow traveler who was constantly by his side and serving him. After a few days, this passenger got up from his bed and started to create a furor on board, drawing the attention of other passengers. He was shouting, screaming and beating his head. On inquiry, he claimed that his bag containing 1,000 gold coins had been stolen. When the people on the boat started to search the passengers one by one, Imam Bukhari quietly slipped the bag of coins into the sea. When he was searched, nothing was found. When he got a chance to be alone with the Imam, the cunning fellow inquired about the money. To his utter amazement, the Imam disclosed that he had thrown it overboard. He asked the Imam why he had wasted such a heavy sum. Imam Bukhari questioned his common sense and told him that he had spent his entire life in the learning and collection of Ahadith. People all over the Islamic empire had confidence and belief in him. If he had been pronounced a thief, his entire effort would have gone down the drain, and all because of a few metal pieces.

Imam Bukhari was hard on himself but tender with others. When his debtors would ask for extension of time, he would readily give them as much time as they needed. People would admonish him on this act but he would reply, "Do you think you are more of a well-wisher to me than my own self? It is not appropriate to put the debtor into difficulty and anxiety." Compassion and consideration were part of his nature.

The Imam would keep his tongue moist with the remembrance of Allah. He once stated that before indulging in any talk of the world, he would always mention the praise of Allah. At the end of the night, he would offer 13 rakats of prayer as a routine. So involved was he in his prayer that once when an insect bit him during his prayer, he did not break his prayer nor did he quickly finish it but continued with composure. Then he removed the poisonous bug, although by then his skin showed signs of swelling here and there. People were concerned about him and wanted to know why he had not completed the prayers quickly. The Imam answered that he had been reciting a chapter of the Quran and he wanted to complete it.

Imam Bukhari once commented, "Man should be in such a state that if he presents a request before his Creator, it should not be turned down." This statement aptly describes the Imam. His prayers would always be answered. We conclude his character sketch at this remark of the Imam, "Once I presented two appeals before my Lord. He fulfilled both the requests immediately. This created in me the apprehension that all the fruits of my labour were being awarded to me now and I would suffer in the Hereafter. Hence I stopped expressing my desires before Allah."

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Naima Sohaib, 40, is the author of "Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shaksiat", a 500-page book in Urdu about twenty most prominent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author.

Naima has a Masters in Islamic Studies from University of Karachi and did her B.Sc. in Mathematics from Lahore College for Women. She has also authored several storybooks for children. She lives in Karachi with her husband and four daughters.

About the Translator

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IMAM GHAZALI

Naima Sohaib

Muslim Heroes series No. 9

Translated by Eman Asif Misbah

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

This booklet is ninth in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by my good friend Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. It tells us about these unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam. I hope that Muslims today will find their stories a source of inspiration.

The current narrative is about a remarkable Muslim hero from the world of learning. Imam Muhammad Ghazali was one of the most celebrated scholars in the history of Sufi Islamic Thought. One of the greatest jurists, theologians and mystics of the time, he is unanimously considered as the Reviver of Islam in the 5th Hijri. He changed the course of early Islamic philosophy, shifting it away from the influence of Greek and Hellenistic philosophies. Imam Ghazali is credited with integrating Sufism into mainstream Islam.

The Western medieval world knew him as Al-Gazel, the man who launched a devastating attack on contemporary philosophical thought. His famous works include "Ahya ul Uloom ud Din" (Revival of Religious Sciences) – a book that combined mysticism with practical everyday life. He was the most staunch refuter of Muttazalite thought.

May Allah reward Sana Dossul, Aarti Lakhwani and Sohaib Umar for the editing, Nadeem Siddiqui for the designing and Asif Misbah, my husband, for his constant encouragement and support.

Eeman Asif Misbah

Imam Ghazali

The Reformer of the 5th Century Hijri and the Genius who Brought about Islamization of Contemporary Knowledge

Introduction

His name was Muhammad, his title was Hujjat-ul-Islam, and he was popularly known as Al-Ghazali.

Birth

He was born in the district of Toos in Khurasan (currently in Iran) in 450 Hijri.

Childhood and Primary Education

Muhammad's father was incidentally unlettered, and having acutely felt the disadvantage throughout his life, he was anxious not to let the same thing happen to his children. Unfortunately he did not live for long. On his deathbed, however, he handed over his two boys to a friend, entrusting them to his care and strongly insisted on their education in order to compensate for his lack of one. This friend arranged for the boys' scholastic needs after their father died. But, after some time, the funds that their father had left were depleted out and there was no way that the same kind of schooling could be continued. The trustee apprised the children of the situation and admitted that he had no wealth of his own that he could spend on them. He recommended that they should join a madrassah (school for religious education). In those days, formal madrassahs were few in number but there were many informal ones in every other house. These were free of cost for the students; their running and maintenance was borne by the elite of the city.

Hence young Muhammad and Ahmed registered themselves in one such institution.

After completing the primary level, Muhammad took an interest in Fiqh sciences, especially the Fiqh of Imam Shaafai, under the tutelage of Ahmed Rafkani. For further education, he traveled to Jurjaan and presented himself before Imam Abu Nasr Isma'eeli. The methodology in those days was different from that of modern times. The teacher would dictate, the students would record, and these writings were called Taaleeqaat. Muhammad, armed with his books, returned to his home country. On the way back, he was accosted by dacoits and was robbed of all belongings, including his notes. Distressed, he approached the leader of the thieves and beseeched him to return the laborious collection that he had traveled so far and worked so hard for. The chief dacoit laughed and ridiculed him, commenting on the use of such knowledge that was contained in a heap of papers. He returned the folders to Muhammad. His words had a profound impact on the youth's mind and he spent the next three years of his life in committing his knowledge to memory.

In the Presence of Imam ul Harmain

Muhammad was restless due to his love of learning, so he proceeded to Nishapur. This city was a centre of learning in those days especially because of the presence of the Imam ul Harmain. The Imam was not only a renowned scholar, a good preacher and an acclaimed author but the authority on Islamic matters was vested in him. Muhammad Ghazali became an avid student, and because of his dedication and intelligence, he soon shone among the rest.

It was a practice in those days that when the teacher concluded with his discourse, the best student would repeat the lecture to the students so that they would be thoroughly familiar with the topic. Very few students would reach this status. Young

Ghazali was selected for this purpose. His teacher was so pleased with him that he compared Ghazali to a wide river of knowledge. He was proud of his student, who, at such a young age, had already authored a book.

Till the Imam ul Harmain was alive, Muhammad Ghazali stayed under his guidance. On his death, he departed from Nishapur. His scholarly status had already elevated to the extent that he now had no equal in the Islamic Empire. And he was just 28 years old.

In the Court of Nizam ul Mulk

When the Abbaside hold weakened over the Islamic Empire, different countries proclaimed their independence and broke away from the central hold. In 425 Hijri, Artughral Baig gained control over Iraq and laid the foundation of the Saljooqi Dynasty. His son Alap Arsalan and his grandson Malik Shah further strengthened the kingdom and increased its territory so that it started to count among the largest in the contemporary world. This was a memorable period in terms of peace and progress in culture and civilization.

The king, Malik Shah, who was a contemporary of Imam Ghazali, had entrusted the affairs of his sultanate to his able prime minister Nizam ul Mulk Toosi. Nizam ul Mulk was a highly capable man who ran the empire with excellence. Renowned for his keen interest in the propagation of knowledge, he decorated his court with a multitude of scholars and intellectuals. On hearing about him, Imam Ghazali also expressed a desire to visit the royal court. He was welcomed with much fanfare.

Widespread Fame and Appointment as the Great Teacher

In those days, contests, debates and rhetorical gatherings had

gained popularity among the elite. A contestant would become celebrated if he had the ability to defeat his opponents in debate. In Nizam's court too, there were heated discussions and arguments on different topics. Imam Ghazali was foremost in taking part in these debates and would always emerge victorious because of his great intellectual capabilities as well as oratory. Nizam ul Mulk wanted to benefit from his exceptional knowledge and appointed him the head of Madrassah Nizamia, making Muhammad Ghazali the first to receive such a great honour at a young age of 34 years. This position was a coveted one among the learned men.

When the Imam started giving discourses at the Baghdad institute, he became an instant hit due to his intellectual depth and articulation. The elite along with the masses began to attend his classes. His class included a large number of teachers, members of the privileged section of society and the general public. The nobility greatly valued him.

His immense influence on the rulers can be ascertained by an incident. The Imam once used his influence to convince the Queen of the Saljooqi Dynasty to include the name of the Abbaside Caliph in Friday sermons. This was customary but important, as it was tantamount to accepting their supremacy. In this manner, Imam Ghazali helped to avoid a clash between the two empires. The Queen had great regard for the Imam and could not reject his advice.

The Abbaside Caliph requested Muhammad Ghazali to write a book against the Baatinia Sect which was promoting Greek philosophical ideas in the minds of people. The Imam acceded to his request and came up with a book called 'Mustazhari', named after the Caliph.

Ghazali in the Throes of Skepticism

It has been mentioned that scholars were widely acclaimed and

respected during the time of Imam Ghazali. The caliphs, the elite and the ministers were all students of eminent scholars. They held them in the highest esteem and would not refuse any request presented by them. Considering that this was the condition of the elite, what can be said regarding the masses. We can only imagine the sway scholars held over the common man.

In this connection, Shibli Naumani mentions an incident in his book 'Al-Ghazali' about Allama Abu Ishaq Shirazi. He says that in those days, Abu Ishaq Shirazi and Imam ul Harmain were regarded as the most prominent figures in religious circles. Allama Shirazi was once nominated as an ambassador of the Abbaside Caliph and traveled to Nishapur. On passing through numerous villages and cities on his way, he was accorded a warm welcome by the entire people of these towns, to the extent that the shopkeepers showered gold coins on him. This kind of adulation was enough to make any person conceited.

Imam Ghazali also received the same kind of attention in Baghdad. He started enjoying his popularity among the elite and the masses alike. At such a young age, he was granted widespread fame and esteem. Most of his time was spent in scholarly discussions and debates. Imam Ghazali had an inquiring mind by nature and Baghdad was a melting pot of philosophies and beliefs as compared to Nishapur. It was exposed to all kinds of sects--including Shia, Sunni, Mautazli, Zindiq, Atheists, Majoosi and Christians, who had complete freedom of expression and aired their views without inhibitions. Imam Ghazali's investigative psyche encouraged him to look closely into all these sects, but the overabundance of opinions on every topic offered by various sects threw the Imam in a quandary. There arose qualms and misgivings about religious matters and beliefs. What he had taken for granted in matters of faith that was instilled in his mind since childhood now seemed shaky. He felt that Christian and Jewish offspring were also

indoctrinated in their faith right from the start. He thought that real knowledge meant that there should be no doubts remaining whatsoever.

For two months, he remained in a state of suspicion and questioned all sources of knowledge, unable to trust his logic, mind, intelligence or sensibilities. After some time, he regained his composure and began an analytical research into the various bodies of religious knowledge. He examined every sect in detail, be it Atheists, Zoroastrians, Sufis, Philosophers, leaving no stone unturned in search of truth. He approached every philosopher, intellectual, Sufi and hermit; he even turned to non-Muslims and atheists to analyze their ideology but failed to receive any clear answers that would guide him to satisfaction.

Imam Ghazali narrates his state in his book *Al Munqaz Fi Zilaal* (The Breaking of Ignorance) as follows:-

"It occurred to me that knowledge was not a sufficient tool to reach the ultimate truth in life. Truth could be ascertained only through a change in personal choices and conditions of life. The knowledge I possessed, be it religious or intellectual, had led me to a firm faith in Allah and the Day of Judgment. This was not due to sufficient proof but it came with experience. I was convinced that the only way to prosper in the afterlife was to attain piety and to restrain the soul from hankering after desires. This could only be achieved by focusing singularly on Allah and living in such a manner that the heart would remain free from worldly desires. This would not be possible without shunning wealth and possessions.

When I analyzed my current situation, I found myself immersed in material well-being. Although I found teaching the most rewarding profession, on further examination, I discovered that I was engaged in subjects that were neither important nor beneficial in the Hereafter. When I pondered over my motives for teaching, it became clear that the objective was not solely to

please Allah, but was aimed at gaining popularity. Now I was convinced that I was at the brink of disaster. Unless I managed to change my condition, I was in grave danger. For some time, I toyed with the idea of leaving the material world and get out of Baghdad, but I could not reach a conclusive decision.

Six months passed in this state. The world and its pleasures pulled me in one direction and the strings of faith in my heart tugged at me towards the next life. My soul repeatedly called out to me that time was running out, the journey ahead was long and that all my efforts in this world were for the sake of recognition and fame. My mind would urge me to maintain the status quo because this could be just a passing phase and this much-coveted status would never be accorded to me once I left this position. Thus the clock kept ticking till finally the matter was taken out of my control and my tongue lost the power of speech. Although I tried to continue my classes on a weekly basis, I had literally become speechless and no words would come out.

I became depressed at no longer being able to deliver anything coherent. That was just the beginning. Next to be affected was my digestive system. My appetite kept reducing till it became difficult to swallow a single bite or even a drop of water. Gradually my other senses and organs started failing. I was in a state of weakness and helplessness. The doctors gave up hope of recovery because they felt that there was a deeper psychological issue here that was beyond their understanding. Till there was a complete mental recovery, there would be no improvement in physical symptoms. I turned to Allah in this state of vulnerability and helplessness and beseeched Him for help. Allah strengthened my resolve to abandon the worldly hankerings and to leave Baghdad. With great difficulty I managed to convince the authorities to let me leave the city. I expressed the desire to go to Makkah but my real intention was to go to Syria.

When the inhabitants of Iraq became aware of my intentions, they reprimanded me and tried to stop me in every way. No one realized that there could be a spiritual purpose behind leaving Iraq. In their opinion I was already at the highest level where religion could be served, then why would I leave? Many rumours circulated about the reason for my departure. Those who were away from the government circles thought that I had been asked to leave by the rulers. But those that were in the know of things knew how intense was the government's desire that I should continue in my job and the monarchy's reluctance to relieve me of my office. Who in his right mind would leave such glory and honour. At last, I bid farewell to Baghdad, and keeping the bare essentials with me, I donated the rest of my possessions."

Now Imam Ghazali was ready to forsake the attractions of the world.

The Conditions at the Time of Al-Ghazali

Muhammad Al Ghazali lived at a time when philosophical and rationalist thought dominated the intellectual arena. Greek text was being translated in the Arabic language because the Abbaside Caliphs (especially Mamoon Rasheed) were impressed by Greek philosophy. All kinds of Greek literature was available, including texts on subjects like Maths, Logic and Medicine. The Muslim mind started to become influenced by Greek thought. There was no harm in benefiting from the earlier Greek works but the questions and answers posed by Greek authors had started to shift the paradigm of thought in the minds of Muslims. The Muslim intellectuals started to think and argue in a manner similar to their Greek counterparts, leaving aside the Islamic paradigm. What is life? What is the connection between humans and the universe? What is the connection between God and the universe? What are the qualities of God? These questions have been sufficiently and

satisfactorily answered in the Holy Quran, but now, Quranic wisdom was not enough to satisfy the Muslim mind.

Through the Quran, Allah informs us about His existence, the creation of human beings and the universe, and about the beginning and end of the world. This knowledge was now being substituted by the exaggerated opinions, inferences and philosophies of Greek thought. These things attracted he attention of Muslim intellectuals just as much as they had welcomed the early Greek efforts in physical sciences that were of benefit to mankind. This train of thought was proving to be dangerous and could lead anywhere. The common terms used in religion were suddenly given new interpretations. The interpretation of Quranic verses was now done in a way that was based on rationalistic principles, instead of the age old method of adhering to the ways of the rightly guided predecessors.

At that point the Muslim Ummah was the only nation in the entire world that was thirsty for knowledge and seeking it from everywhere. Curiosity and intellectual pursuits had become a part of their nature. Their burning desire to explore the universe and discover its secrets would not allow them to rest in peace. They were in a state of perpetual mental flurry to acquire more knowledge from anywhere and anyone. Under the same spirit they tried to obtain knowledge from the Greek. But the fatal mistake was in their failure to evaluate these disciplines in the light of Quran and Sunnah. Human nature generally borders on the extreme. The Muslims of that age were so obsessed with gathering knowledge that they forgot the difference between right and wrong. On the flip side, today we find the Muslims in a state of apathy towards the acquisition of worldly sciences.

The Muslim intellectuals of that time were deeply attracted to Greek wisdom and ideology. The efforts of renowned scholars like Yaqoob Kindi, Abu Nasr Farabi and Bu Ali Seena were

directed towards the learning of the technicalities and teaching of Greek philosophy. Aristotle had a charismatic effect on Muslim society and culture because of his strong personality, deep thinking and writings. It appeared as though he was no less than a prophet for the Muslim intellect.

In the middle of the 4th century Hijri, a secret organization by the name of Ikhwan us Safa was formed in Baghdad. It was based on the same lines as the Free Mason society. It took Greek thought as its standard, and all religious debates and discussions on major principles were subject to it. Decisions on current issues were taken by this association. Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi, in his landmark book "The History of Dawah and Courage", has stated the purpose behind this organization in the following words, "The Islamic Shariah has become polluted by the combination of ignorance and waywardness. It can only be cleansed through philosophy, because philosophy and logic are dominant over religious principles and traditional deductive processes in religion. Now the ultimate perfection lies in the blend of Islamic law and Greek philosophy."

This movement targeted the young generation of Muslims specifically for the reason that untrained and fresh minds absorb new ideas better. Their literature was propagated throughout the Muslim lands. The Muttazalites (rationalists) were foremost in accepting this Free Mason approach.

It would be appropriate to mention here that while the Muttazalites tried to explain religious principles in the light of reason and logic, yet in their widest imaginations they had never thought of doubting the accepted concepts like revelation, prophets, revealed books and Allah himself. But these philosophers had deviated largely from mainstream religion.

The principles of philosophy are completely different from those of religion. Religion is presented simply and in an uncomplicated manner. In contrast, philosophers tend to

present all beliefs in a complex, convoluted fashion making matters of faith difficult to grasp by the common masses. But the common Muslim had come under the influence of the philosophers.

Islam was sent by Allah for the guidance of mankind. The arguments presented in the Quran revolve around this purpose. On the contrary, philosophical debates often involve inane issues and vain concepts. Many a times, they have no practical aspect and do not provide guidance to human life. Above all, there is a critical difference between philosophy and Quran. The former is an inexact and uncertain body of knowledge created by the human mind while the latter is a revelation by Allah, and is knowledge sure and supreme. After the opening chapter, the next chapter in the Quran declares that it is a book in which there is no doubt and it is a source of guidance for the God-conscious. People who are engaged in doubts and uncertainties about its origin and about Allah will never benefit from it.

Philosophy raises a series of basic questions on which depends the direction of human life. The One who created man also has the responsibility to answer these basic questions satisfactorily in order to prepare human beings for the Hereafter. Allah has sent us the Quran for guidance and informs us of definite, absolute knowledge through this remarkable revelation. One cannot attain this reality through the five senses, logic, rationale or philosophy alone. Knowledge based on heavenly revelation is superior to conclusions reached by human intellect. Yet blind adherence to philosophical conjectures belittled the importance of religion and the wisdom of the prophets. These inferences had a drastic effect on the minds of Muslims in terms of basic beliefs and behaviour. There arose groups among Muslims who would openly put down religion and publicly express their contempt in matters of faith. These were Muslims only by name and not by spirit or practice.

Emergence of the Batinia Sect

Under the influence of Greek thought, the Muslim mind became vulnerable to all new concepts and new ideas in religion. Taking advantage of this state of affairs, a grave plot was concocted against Islam which aimed at shaking the very foundations on which the Islamic faith was established. The point was to steer the Muslim masses away from the real principles and character of Quranic Shariah and to mar the unity that existed in Muslim circles. Thus the superiority that the Muslims enjoyed among the nations of the existing world would be lost. The instigators of this scheme were the displaced monarchs and their disciples who had lost their positions or kingdoms. They had converted to Islam because it seemed advantageous to do so. Also conniving with them were those Muslims who thought the restrictions of Islam to be burdensome and unnecessary. Their pleasure-seeking natures were on the look-out for a religion that suited and supported their life-styles. The Rafizi (Shiites) also managed to gain a place under this umbrella.

The Batinia Sect tried to develop uncertainty about Islamic principles and ideology. They propagated the view that just as words have literal and deeper meanings, likewise the verses of the Quran and the text of the Ahadith have literal and hidden meanings. According to them, only scholars could determine the implied connotation. All those who followed the Quran literally were deemed as unintelligent. That is why they had allowed themselves to be trapped by the stringent conditions of the Shariah.

Hence new interpretations were given to established concepts in religion like prophethood, revelation, angels, the Day of Judgment, Shariah, Obligatory Duties, Halaal, Haraam, Salaat, Zakat, Fasting, Hajj, etc. Until now these terms had been agreed upon by all the scholars and the common Muslims and

there was no conflict of opinion. The Batinia faction understood that this unity on basic principles was the foundation on which Islamic pillars were built. Hence if the foundation was damaged, the whole establishment would collapse automatically.

Islam is not open to personal interpretation of this nature. If every person, considering himself to be intelligent enough, tries to interpret the Quran in his own way, the religion of Islam would be a concoction of desires, limitations, waywardness and imagination. The final word of Allah would become subject to distortion.

The Batinia faction did not only have malevolent designs on the principles of Islam, but they also had political ambitions. For the realization of their political dreams, they would target important and influential persons. The Islamic states in power at those times were significantly drained by their maneuvers. Many accomplished personalities were attacked and killed. Among them were Nizam-ul-Mulk Tusi and Fakhr-ul-Mulk. No scholar or king in the Islamic Empire could sleep peacefully in the night for fear of being slain by the Batinia group.

Hence it was a tough period for Islam as devout Muslims were not safe from the Batinia schemes. Some of the masses joined the flow and some were merely spectators. The intellectuals viewed the picture with horror but were helpless to stop the current of erroneous concepts and beliefs that had crept into religion. They took shelter in mosques, madrassahs and other places of solace and worship.

Forsaking of Homeland

We know through the Quran that only those people shall attain salvation that make an effort against the evil forces. This concept is reinforced in the event of the Sabbath-breakers. The ones who forge ahead in disbelief, the ones who encourage

them, and the ones who are silent spectators will all be losers in the hereafter.

This was the environment in which Imam Ghazali found himself, a specialist in all the religious sciences of his time. He became the most renowned scholar of his day and age. His days were occupied in intellectual debates. With the passing of time, he realized that he was unmindful of true reality and he was oblivious of the true existence of his Lord. Awareness of the pointlessness of unending discourses and intellectual discussions brought the realization of the emptiness inside. He delved into a valley of suspicion about the state of existence and reality and, for a while, lost himself.

Imam Ghazali left his worldly abode and traveled to Syria. He spent his days and nights in solitude, spiritual exercises and purification of his soul. For a long period he remained in a state of seclusion at the Jamia Mosque of Damascus. Then he traveled towards Jerusalem and paid respects to the grave of Ibrahim (AS) and the birth place of Jesus (AS). There he was enveloped in a strange frame of mind.

The search for truth would sometimes lead him to scholars of religion and sometimes to the jungles and deserts where he would introspect and analyze himself. A person met Imam Ghazali in this state, roughly clad in a robe with a water skin in his hand. This man had witnessed the Imam presiding over a class of 400 students, so he was utterly bewildered. But the Imam had no concern for what the public thought of him.

Later, the love of Makkah and Madina drew him to Hijaz and he performed Umrah and Hajj. After that, he returned to his homeland. He writes:

“After performing Hajj, the love of my family and their constant prayers drew me back to my homeland, even though I had initially bolted out of my country in frustration. Here, I kept to

my self and continued the process of self-purification. However, different incidents and financial circumstances of the family did not let me rest in peace. The contentment of the heart and its focus were broken. But I would not give up hope and from time to time, I would continue to experience a cleansing of the heart and soul. Ten years passed and the current state of affairs remained unchanged. In this solitary confinement, I gained deep insight, the details of which cannot be described here. For the benefit of the readers, I would like to say that I came to the definite conclusion that only the Sufis are on the true path to Allah. Their character is the best, their way the most righteous, their manners and behavior superior. If all the scholarly intelligence was combined, if all the wisdom of the sages was collected, if the knowledge of the scholars of Shariah was put together, it would not be able to produce more righteous living than the Sufi way. Their way of life resembles the pattern followed by the Holy Prophet (SAW) and he was the brightest light that ever traversed the earth."

End of Solitude

The endless endeavours at purification of the heart and soul did much to alleviate the mental confusion and anxiety that Imam Ghazali had been experiencing. The clouds of skepticism vanished and reality became crystal clear. When the heart was illuminated, it could perceive the essence of all religious branches of knowledge. The Imam started to recognize the theoretical and practical weaknesses existing in the various segments of Muslim population. He meditated on the reasons for these deficiencies and began to see how these issues could be resolved. It occurred to him that a monumental task lay ahead – to free the Muslim masses from the skepticism of the philosophers, the waywardness of the mystics, and the empty rhetoric of the scholars. Imam Ghazali writes about the thoughts that were cropping up in his mind,

"I had a strong intuition that this was what I needed to do, and this was the need of the hour. I thought to myself that this life of solitude was not ordained by Allah. The disease of transgression and deviation had spread like a malady throughout the Muslim Ummah and the doctors (scholars) themselves were ailing. The creation of Allah had reached a point of self-annihilation. Then I convinced myself by arguing that this gigantic endeavour was impossible for me to carry out alone. The era of the Prophet (SAW) was long past. Evil forces were at large. If I tried to convince the masses out of their erroneous beliefs which they had adopted and were fond of, the whole Muslim Ummah would turn against me. How would I face them alone and how miserable life would become. This responsibility should be undertaken in times of ease, and in times when the ruler is religious minded and powerful. With these arguments, I persuaded myself not to get involved in the affairs of the Muslim Ummah. I convinced myself of the permissibility of a life of seclusion.

Apparently Allah had other plans for me. He put the thought across to the ruling Sultan who called me to his court in Nishapur in order to combat the elements hostile to Islam. This was an order from the top and non-compliance would have resulted in serious consequences. I realized that I no longer had an excuse to remain in this state. The solitary confinement to which I had accustomed myself would now be no more than laziness and comfort seeking. The cocoon that I was ensconced in was just a shell to protect myself from discomfort and trials. Allah states in the Quran, *Do people think that they will be spared by merely stating their belief and they won't be tested? The ones that passed earlier have all been put to the test. Allah has surely to see who is sincere and who is a liar.*

Allah has revealed the following to His Prophet (SAW), the most honourable among mankind: *Many prophets have been rejected before you, but they remained patient under difficulties*

and duress – till Our support reached them. No one has the power to change the verdict of Allah and whatever befell previous prophets has reached your ears.

I consulted a number of spiritually elevated souls regarding this. They unanimously supported the idea of ending my isolated existence. Further backing came in the form of dreams to many righteous associates. There were indications that this step would be very fruitful for the Muslim Ummah. There was a month left for the 5th century Hijri to begin, and it appeared to be the start of a great reformation movement. According to a Hadith, Allah sends a reformist (Mujaddid) at the start of every century to refresh His religion for its followers. All these signs and visions motivated me to plan for the monumental task ahead.

This was 499 Hijri and the month of Zil Qa'ada. I had departed from Baghdad in 486 Hijri. My solitary way of life had lasted for 11 years. Things happen according to Allah's design. It had once seemed impossible and insane to leave the pomp and show, and the highly coveted position that I had commanded in Baghdad; but Allah made the impossible possible. Similarly, it had, until recently, seemed unimaginable to end the comfort zone of a secluded life, away from the distractions of the society. But once again Allah pushed me in the right direction."

For a second time, Imam Ghazali was restored to his previous position as the Imam of the Nizamia Madrassah in Baghdad. An interesting account is written by him about his emotional state after assuming this position. His narrative contains a lesson for every Muslim scholar, preacher and missionary,

"Having returned to the field of dissemination of Islamic education, I felt that the two situations had no similarity. There was a world of difference in my outlook now. Previously, I was teaching subjects that had a material benefit and I would invite all and sundry to it with my speech and conduct. My ambitions

were materialistic. But now I invite to a realm of knowledge that takes one away from worldly charms. Today I seek spiritual progress and development for myself and for others. I do not know if I shall ever realize my goals or whether I shall die before my dream comes true. My experiences and my faith have taught me that real power lies in the hands of Allah. Only He can save a person from falling into error and protect him from evil. He alone can guide towards truth and reformation. I did not make an effort on my own; Allah forced me to struggle for this cause. I did not start this work; Allah put me to the task. I pray to Allah that he should reform me first, and then may others find guidance through me. Reality should dawn on me and give me the ability to submit before divine revelation. Falsehood should be revealed to me and I should be saved from its trap."

The Reformation Masterpiece of Imam Ghazali

Imam Ghazali started his reformation efforts with the pen and the tongue. The purpose was to correct the erroneous concepts of atheistic and Batinia sects which had crept into the Muslim minds. Before he took on this endeavour, he wrote books on philosophy according to the Greek methodology, with a view to end its sway over the masses. Perhaps he wanted to prove firsthand his expertise in Greek thought and dilute Greek philosophers' influence over all and sundry. His book "Objectives of Philosophy" highlights key concepts in philosophy in simple terminology. The uniqueness of this book lies in the fact that the most intricate concepts have been presented in such a simple and easy-to-understand manner that everyone can comprehend them. This effort of the Imam put all aspects of philosophy within the reach of the common man and mitigated the admiration and awe that was associated with the subject.

This book had far-reaching effects on the masses in terms of

understanding the principles and conjectures involved in philosophy. It was now needed to reject these errand philosophies in a well-argued manner. Imam Ghazali writes, "In those days, some persons had the notion that their intellect was superior to that of the common man. They would look down upon religious commandments and key principles, and were heavily impressed by great philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, etc. These Greek scholars would mock religious ideas, and as they ruled the world with their conjectures, it was assumed that their theories could not be rejected. Their opposition to religion meant that indeed Islam too was merely a play of words and there was no truth to it. They thought the verses of the Quran were just captivating and alluring but did not represent reality. I decided to oppose their fallacious viewpoints on religion which were based on weak underlying principles and point out their errors in order to expose their inadequacy and absurdity."

Keeping these objectives in mind, Imam Ghazali produced an extraordinary book called *Tahafat ul Falasafa*. In this volume, the Imam demonstrated the inanity and ridiculous concepts contained in Greek philosophy. He pointed out their mistakes and fallacious assumptions with an Islamic viewpoint. So magnificent was his critique that it broke the back of Greek influence and the Muslim intellectuals as well as masses were no longer impressed by Greek scholars. Instead of assuming a defensive posture, the Imam launched into an offensive. Rather than using apologetic language, he openly rejected their false assumptions, which really came out of nowhere and were incredulous. Imam Ghazali writes, "I am amazed that even a crazy man can be impressed by such preposterous notions, let alone the intelligentsia who claim to go into the nitty gritty of even basic issues."

This was the special endeavour that Islam needed for the enlightenment of Muslims. Till then, any opposition to Greek

philosophy had been conducted in an apologetic manner. The language used in Ghazali's book was poised, confident and non-apologetic. One reaction to this work was that a wave of anger and frustration erupted in the circles of intellectuals. Another effect, which was the desired objective, was the gearing of the Muslim masses towards true guidance.

The Imam also clashed with the Batinia sect. This sect had been instrumental in weakening the fundamentals of faith by introducing new terminology and new ways of thinking in what had been established principles. Muslim morality was at a low point because of the flaws that had crept in the Muslim mental fiber due to the combined influence of Batinia and various other sects.

In the recent past, when Imam Ghazali had adopted a secluded lifestyle, his heart still bled at the condition of the Muslims. Rich or poor, elite or humble, educated or ignorant, pious or drunkard - moral ruin seemed to be the order of the day. The scholars of religion who could have provided a guiding light to the masses seemed too busy in worldly pursuits. In this state of frustration and unrest, the Imam wrote his memorable book, "*Ahya ul Uloom ud Deen."*

Ahya ul Uloom ud Deen (Revival of Islamic Sciences) – A Landmark Book of Purification, Reform and Accountability

The book 'Revival of Islamic Sciences' was written with a view to reform Muslim character and correct their belief system. It critically views the different segments of the society and gives sound advice and solutions for the betterment of each. Outstanding work of this nature is produced once in many centuries. To this day, this book remains amongst the most famous and effective in the Muslim world.

The book throws light on the core reality of life as well as the

depth of existence. It also explains the reasoning behind Islamic principles and commandments. Prior to this, no one attempted to do such a comprehensive work on this subject. Another unique feature of this book is that it gives suggestions on how to inculcate righteous behaviour and offers ways and means of staying away from satanic influences. On the one hand, the Imam has furnished the seeker of truth with advice on reform and purification, and on the other hand, he has aimed at educating and liberating the masses from unproductive thinking, hence bringing them into the fold of Islam. He has employed Quranic references, Ahadith and sayings of eminent companions to accomplish these goals.

"The Revival of Islamic Sciences" is an incomparable book on Islamic philosophy of ethics. Throwing light on spiritual diseases, human psychology and physical needs, it provides excellent guidance on how to lead an Islamic existence. When Imam Ghazali speaks about a particular topic, he discusses it in a comprehensive manner. For instance, in the discourse on backbiting, the Imam explains what is bad-mouthing, what are its causes, what are its consequences and how can we stay away from this disease of the heart. In addition, he furnishes the reader with relevant quotes from the Quran, Ahadith, from the lives of the Companions of the Prophet, and the stories of devout men. By the end, a complete picture is formed in the mind of the reader about the subject under discussion. This is the aim that the Imam has kept in mind throughout the book.

Imam Ghazali has identified the weaknesses present in various elements of the social order by critically examining the then existing structures. He has stated that the purpose of a man's life is to succeed in the Hereafter and to gain the pleasure of Allah. The trickery and connivance of Satan has deluded mankind out of recognizing true reality and has shifted man's focus towards the glitter and glamour of worldly life.

In the days of Ghazali, the religious scholars were engaged in endless debates, the elite were lavishing in their luxury, and the government officials were involved in their cruel and corrupt practices. The general population was consumed with decadent traditions, religious innovations and sinful activities. Imam Ghazali critically analyzed all these elements of the society and gave practical and useful tips on reforming the state of affairs.

First, the Imam criticized the religious scholars who were responsible for spreading the light of the Quran and prophetic wisdom. He points out rightly that had the scholars not fallen into sin, the rulers would not have deviated from Islamic practices to such an extent. They would have feared the backlash from the scholars on adopting malevolent practices. However, the scholars had lost the ability to rebuke the rulers for their mistakes because they had become sycophants themselves of the stately class. Imam Ghazali describes the righteous attitude of the earlier righteous scholars in these words:

"Such was the attitude of the scholars; they were least impressed with the riches and opulent lifestyle of the Sultans. They were confident and self-reliant, hopeful of martyrdom in order to gain the pleasure of their Lord. Since they had pure intentions, they succeeded in melting the hardest of hearts.

Today, the situation is quite the reverse. The love of wealth and riches has paralyzed the tongues of the scholars. When they do speak up, their words seem hollow because they are not backed by action. Even today, if they purify their intentions and work sincerely, seeking to disseminate correct knowledge, they would be successful in their efforts to reform the society. The degeneration of the masses results from the moral corruption of the ruling gentry which is a result of the moral decay of the religious scholars. This unethical conduct of the scholars stems from their love for worldly wealth and position. A person who

is enveloped in the love of materialism can hardly lift a finger to correct even ordinary men, let alone undertake the reformation of men of stature."

The Imam is critical of the fact that matters of little practical usage and importance in legal law were highlighted, while issues that pertained to the betterment and improvement of every human being were ignored.

Imam Ghazali next turns his attention to the Sultans whose prosperity and wealth smacked of extortion and illegal means. These riches were presented to the religious scholars to buy their hearts and souls. He expresses his views thus:

"The monarchs are generous towards those religious scholars who they know can be manipulated. These scholars are expected to support them, help them further their own personal goals, add glory to their courts by their presence, pray for their success, praise them to the skies, whether absent or present in the court. The first issue here is one of humiliation, the second of visiting them for royal services, the third of sycophancy, the fourth of aiding them in their times of need, the fifth of attendance in the royal court, the sixth of expressing affection and friendship, and faithfully supporting the Sultan against rivals, the seventh of hiding and covering the heinous crimes committed by the gentry. If a person is not ready to stoop to even one of these levels, the monarchs will not spend a mean penny on him even if he is of the caliber of Imam Shaafai. Hence it is presently not lawful to accept any stipend or allowance from the royal treasury, even if it is known to be collected through lawful means, because this would lead to the consequences mentioned above. What to say about wealth which has been obtained through illegal or suspicious means."

Hence we see that Imam Ghazali considers the mutually beneficial relationship between the kings and the scholars as the core cause for the moral decay of the Ummah. He rebukes the

religious scholars and advises them to stay away from royalty, their courtiers, ministers and the elite class. The Imam himself wrote a series of letters addressed to the kings, their governors and the members of the royal assemblies with a view to reform their conduct.

A revivalist is blessed with insight into the weaknesses, character traits and attitudes of each segment of the society. He is a psychoanalyst, and a truth seeker, and has his finger on the pulse of the nation. He can diagnose the issues, trials and tribulations that the society is facing as a whole. Imam Ghazali had all these attributes and more. He had remarkable powers of observation and he had the courage to speak the truth. He detected the spiritual diseases present in the Muslim masses and criticized their false doctrines. He targeted the sins, false beliefs and moral diseases that the masses had fallen into. The Imam also pointed out questionable customs that the Muslims had adopted without being aware of the same. He had a holistic approach towards the social order and was able to pick out the major transgressions of the Muslims. Imam Ghazali can be credited with doing a thorough job and he included the mosques, market places, roads, and social gatherings in his analysis.

The amazing quality about this volume is that it throws light on a wide range of topics, and at the same time it does justice to each subject matter under discussion. To put it another way, it scores high on both reach as well as richness. The benefits and unique features of this book rendered it indispensable for future generations and it was widely acclaimed among all segments of the society.

While perusing the book, one does feel that weak Ahadith and traditions have been included. Imam Ghazali acquired the knowledge of Ahadith at a later stage in his life, hence the authenticity of the Prophetic sayings mentioned in the book

could be examined more carefully and commented on. In fact, many scholars have pointed out the grade and class of the Ahadith in commentaries on the book. Ahya-ul-Uloom has been translated into many languages including Urdu. Those of us who are constantly concerned about the purification of their hearts will benefit a lot from this book.

Opposition to Imam Ghazali

Imam Ghazali had accepted the exalted position – the highest seat of learning in the Islamic Empire – at the request of Fakhr-ul-Mulk, the prime minister of Sanjar Saljuqi, the governor of Khurasan. Fakhr-ul-Mulk was a man of letters. He personally visited the Imam and requested him to occupy this position of eminence in Nishapur. However, a year later, Fakhr-ul-Mulk was martyred at the hands of a Baatinia extremist. Following this event, Imam Ghazali relinquished his position after a few days and settled in Toos. Here he laid the foundation of a Madrassah and a sanctuary, where he taught all kinds of religious and spiritual sciences till he died.

Imam Ghazali had reached a point where his fame had spread far and wide. He was envied by some segments of the society who had a malicious intent towards him. This led to the Imam being produced in Sanjar's court on the basis of a book he wrote many years before which contained some criticism on Imam Abu Hanifa. Sanjar was himself not learned enough to decipher the truth. Believing the accusers he ordered the Imam to attend the court. Imam Ghazali, who had sworn against entering a royal court, proceeded as a response to the official order and stopped short before reaching the destination. Here he wrote a lengthy dispatch to the governor. After reading the letter, Sanjar was even keener to meet him and eagerly awaited the Imam's explanation on the matter that he was being accused of. Finally, with a heavy heart, the Imam entered the court of Sanjar. The governor stood up in reverence for this fascinating

celebrity of the Muslim Empire, who was shaking with trepidation at this moment. Imam Ghazali asked a companion to recite any verse of the Quran. He recited the following verse: *"Isn't Allah sufficient for his servant?"*

These words of revelation had an immediate calming effect on the Imam's nerves. He courageously delivered a heartrending speech in the court, which highlighted the pathetic condition of the Muslim Ummah and also refuted the false claims made against him.

Sanjar was visibly moved by the Imam's soulful rendition. He wished that the scholars of Iraq and Khurasan were present to benefit from the vast knowledge of the Imam. He also announced that he would make it mandatory on all the scholars to pay an annual visit to Imam Ghazali and seek resolution of their difficulties on various issues from him.

Repeated Call for Restoration to Previous Position and the Imam's Refusal

Once again, Imam Ghazali was pressed to accept the key position as head of the Nizamia Baghdad. The intense desire of the Abbasid Caliph, the letter of request by the Prime Minister, and the stamps of approval of all the dignitaries of the court did nothing to change the Imam's mind.

Imam Muhammad Ghazali wrote a lengthy letter in reply, explaining his reasons for refusing the coveted position. He stated personal grounds as well as his promise made at the grave of Prophet Ibrahim (AS) that he would leave the arena of confrontations and debates. As Baghdad thrived on argumentative contests, these would be unavoidable if he accepted the position offered to him. Another cause was his desire to stay away from royal visits. Additionally, it was against his policy to accept stately gifts and allowances, and he had no source of income in Baghdad. He was also concerned

about the 150 students who had gathered in Toos to benefit from his knowledge.

The Knowledge of Ahadith

Imam Ghazali was not an expert on Ahadith and he realized the presence of this vacuum. Hence when the famous scholar of Ahadith, Umar Bin Abi Hasan visited Toos, the Imam wasted no opportunity and hastened to extend his hospitality to him. The scholar taught him Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim.

Death

The Imam remained immersed in his teaching activities till his last days. He woke up one fine Monday morning, in 505 Hijri, in the month of Jumadi-us-Saani, and performed his ablution. He ordered a burial shroud for himself and patted his eyes with it and uttered the words, "May the will of the Lord be done." Then he lied down and stretched his legs. The people around him realized that he had passed away. He was buried at the place called Tahiraan.

The Outstanding Personality of the Imam

A look at Imam Muhammad Ghazali's life reveals some exceptional features, qualities which are hardly figured in personalities of historical fame. We discuss these qualities one by one in the following pages.

The Unrelenting Pursuit of Truth

When we read the account of Imam Ghazali's life, it strikes us that Allah chooses those souls for his perceptive understanding whose intention is His exclusive pleasure. Such people are willing to sacrifice personal glory, wealth, family, homeland, and anything else that comes in the way.

The same unrelenting pursuit of truth was present in the quest of

Salman Farsi (RA), the Prophet's beloved companion. He too purified his intention for the sole pleasure of Allah and was prepared to meet all kinds of hardships and adversities in his search for the truth. It takes an extraordinary human being to go through such arduous ordeals. The Quran mentions the tremendous zeal exhibited by Ibrahim (AS), his worthy sacrifices and his selflessness. Allah honoured him by calling him his Khalil (friend) and the Leader of future mankind. This rank was bestowed upon him for his never-ending loyalty to Allah, and his amazing spirit of submission to the will of Allah, which led him to attempt to slaughter his beloved son when so ordered. Never was there a moment's hesitation in carrying out the commands of Allah in Ibrahim's life. He never faltered. He left an incredible example for mankind to follow – the model of uprightness and unswerving search for the truth.

Abul-Hasan Ali Nadvi comments, "This unrelenting pursuit of truth led Imam Ghazali away from the glamorous royal status and headed him towards years of solitude in the wilderness and deserts. Despite heavy persuasion he refused to attend the court of the dignitaries and was indifferent to all the honour bestowed upon him. He once mentioned in his book that the last thing to leave the heart of a true believer is the love of position or glory in the world. The last years of Imam Ghazali are a witness to the fact that he attained this lofty goal."

Hence we see that the Imam decided to forsake fame, position, honour, wealth and family to purify his soul. He put aside his pride and ego and changed his course from the desire of the world to the desire for God. Although he was an expert in the contemporary sciences taught in the Islamic world, he was still aware of his weak knowledge of Ahadith. Thus, when the whole world was raving about his accomplishments and knowledge, the teacher of teachers Imam Ghazali was busy learning Ahadith as a serious student.

The Concern for the Reformation of the Ummah

Next was his return to the real world from his solitude in order to improve the lot of the Muslim masses. It may be difficult for an ordinary person to comprehend, but the reality is that once a person is acquainted with the remembrance of Allah, His qualities and traits, and feels His presence through mystical experience, it becomes very hard for him to return to a normal worldly existence. This was a real test that the Imam faced. First he left the world for Allah's sake, and then resumed his position for the same, in order to reform the Ummah. This sincerity of purpose shines through in his writings.

Abul-Hasan Ali Nadvi writes, "His purity of intention is acknowledged by friend and foe alike, and it leaps out of his writings. The great scholar of Islam, Ibne Taimiya, was a strong critic of Imam Ghazali and had differences of opinion with him, but still counts him among the greatest of the sincere Muslims. The main reason for the popularity and impact of his writings is this purity of intention."

Besides the writing of precious volumes for the betterment of the Muslims, Imam Muhammad Ghazali also stood up against injustice and erroneous practices in the courts of Muslim rulers. He wrote numerous letters to ministers and the elite, bringing their attention towards their negligence and weaknesses. These efforts at reforming the society and the rulers had a significant impact. However, because the mindset of the nation was completely derailed, there existed the need to re-establish the foundations of the Muslim Empire on the principles of Islam. This was not possible during the reign of the Saljooks. However, a Spanish student of Imam Ghazali, by the name of Muhammad Bin Abdullah, was a staunch follower and he overthrew the tyrannical government of Ali Bin Yusuf Tashfeen. Now a new caliphate came into existence – the Muwahiddin Dynasty. A capable and sincere ruler, Abdul

Momin, was placed on the throne. Sultan Abdul Momin and his sons laid the foundation of a just society based on Islamic principles – consultation, justice and general welfare of the masses.

Exemplary Preparation to Fight the Forces of Falsehood

The laborious endeavor that Imam Ghazali undertook towards the eradication of fabricated sciences is an example for Muslim scholars of all times. By his own practice, he demonstrated the way to fight against literary and practical ordeals that may come in the way of Muslims till the Day of Judgment. His methodology is to first get a firm grasp on religious sciences so that they penetrate deeply into the heart and mind. Next, one should become an expert on contemporary sciences to the extent that one's proficiency is acclaimed by friend and foe alike. Then, one should challenge the modern philosophies against Islamic principles, logic and experience. If modern concepts do not contradict any of these three conditions, they could be accepted, otherwise one should reject them with full conviction of the heart. This is a successful method of eradicating the foundations of fabricated ideologies.

If we study Islamic history, we realize sorrowfully that a lot has been done by the religious scholars to propagate the religion of Allah, but they could not make efforts of equal measure to combat bogus ideologies – which was the need of the hour. Perhaps the biggest reason for this was that Muslim scholars did not perceive the intense effort and study required to understand in depth the false theories before seeking to dispute them. It seems that they were content to merely gain expertise in religious sciences. This is where they erred, in our opinion. Religious proficiency may be enough for gaining success in the Hereafter, but for fighting the satanic forces prevalent in the world, the least exertion put in must be equal to the effort exhibited by the negative elements in propagating their false

ideologies. In this regard, a cursory glance reveals that the west's struggle for supremacy is unsurpassed in terms of western ideologies, theories and doctrines. The west is neither concerned with the pleasure of Allah nor the eternal quest for Jannah. On the other hand, Muslims have recognized the truth and are aware of the promises of their Lord. Yet, their efforts are pathetic and substandard. Thus we see that Allah has passed on the control of worldly affairs to the western superpowers and the whole world turns to them for support and guidance.

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About the Author

Naima Sohaib, 40, is the author of "Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shaksiat", a 500-page book in Urdu about twenty most prominent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author.

Naima has a Masters in Islamic Studies from University of Karachi and did her B.Sc. in Mathematics from Lahore College for Women. She has also authored several storybooks for children. She lives in Karachi with her husband and four daughters.

About the Translator

Eeman Asif Misbah, 45, is the English translator of the original Urdu book. She converted from Hinduism in 1996 after studying Islam for several years. Her passion to seek knowledge about great personalities of Muslim history led her to the present translation work. She is an avid reader of Islamic books.

Eeman is an MBA from Institute of Business Administration, Karachi. An expert in human resource management and general administration, she worked in the financial sector before her marriage. She lives in Karachi with her husband and two children.

SULTAN SALAHUDDIN AYYUBI

Naima Sohaib

Muslim Heroes series No. 10

Translated by Eman Asif Misbah

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

This booklet is tenth in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by my good friend Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. It tells us about these unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam. I hope that Muslims today will find their stories a source of inspiration.

The current narrative is about an acclaimed Muslim general who spent almost his whole life on the battlefield. Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi was from a Kurdish background and was born in 1138. His formal military career began at the age of 14 years. He fought over a hundred battles and bravely fought the Crusaders for 20 years. In the Battle of Hittin in 1187, he dealt the Crusaders a final blow from which they never recovered.

Some of his most ardent admirers are European biographers. What attracts them is his perfect sense of enlightened moderation and cultured chivalry. To the west, he is known as 'Saladin'. Because of his magnanimity, chivalry and evenhandedness, he became immensely popular with the masses – be they Muslim or Christians. In him, nature had harmoniously blended the benevolent heart of a Muslim and a matchless military genius.

May Allah reward Sana Dossul, Sameera Dadabhoy and Sohaib Umar for the editing, Nadeem Siddiqui for the designing and Asif Misbah, my husband, for his constant encouragement and support.

Eeman Asif Misbah

Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi

The Decisive Victor of the Crusades and the Liberator of Bait ul Maqdas from Christian Hold

Introduction

His name was Salahuddin Ayyubi and he belonged to an honourable Kurdish tribe (now part of Iraq and Turkey). This tribe was known for its hospitability, courage and bravery. They were proud of their reputation and honoured it wholeheartedly.

Salahuddin's grandfather, Shaadi Sultan, was appointed the ruler of the fort at Takreet during the regime of Masood Saljooqi. After the death of his grandfather, Salahuddin's father, Najamuddin was nominated as the sovereign of the fort. He was kindhearted, well-mannered, generous, a patron of letters and a benefactor of the scholars.

Birth and Childhood Events

Salahuddin was born in 532 Hijri or the year 1138 A.D. in the fort at Takreet. The day he was born was the very day that his father was dismissed from his stately position and asked to vacate the city. Various reasons have been quoted for his removal from office. Whatever the actual reason, Salahuddin's father and his uncle, Sher Koh, presented themselves before the great monarch, Atabuk Azam Imaduddin Zangi. Here, they were received with much fanfare. Imaduddin Zangi had not forgotten the favor that Najamuddin had once done to him.

It so happened that in the year 1132, the vanquished army of Sultan Zangi was making an effort to cross the River Tigris but

to no avail. Najamuddin, who was then the ruler of the fort at Takreet, gathered a fleet of wooden boats with the help of which the army crossed safely to the other bank. To return the favour, Imaduddin Zangi granted a lot of valuable property to his benefactor and also gave him the charge of the Fort of Ba'albak.

When the Sultan died, Salahuddin was merely 9 years old. His father and uncle took him to the son of the monarch, Noorudin Mahmood Bin Zangi. Sultan Nooruddin was so impressed by their courage, dignity and organizational abilities that he made them his close associates and appointed them as commanders of his army.

Maturity and Opportunity for Jihad

There are no detailed historical accounts of Salahuddin's childhood. However, when he turned 16, he began to accompany his father and uncle to the court of the Sultan. Even at such a tender age, Salahuddin was composed and levelheaded. Sultan Nooruddin could perceive in him the qualities of courtesy, astuteness, intellect and valor. Under his personal supervision, he began to send the lad on military expeditions. Salahuddin had a conciliatory, mild and non-aggressive nature. At this age, he was hardly interested in fighting and warfare.

Salahuddin accompanied the second expedition to Egypt on the orders of the Sultan. He later expressed that he felt as if his heart had been pierced by a sharp knife. But the Sultan did not pay any heed to his emotions and instead, readied for him suitable weaponry for the battlefield. The helpless youth succumbed in the face of the royal command. This incident has been recorded in detail by Ibn Aseer.

Fate had compelled Salahuddin towards jihad. It would be appropriate to give a background of the events unfolding at the

time.

At the end of the 11th century A.D. the situation in the Middle East took a turn for the worst and the Muslims were confronted with internal strife and external aggression. The Caliph of the Muslim Empire in Baghdad was helpless and incapable of handling the alarming situation. Syria was comprised of a number of small Arab states, each of which was controlled by an independent chief. The grand empire of the Suljooqi Turks had been shattered. However, Imaduddin Zangi, who had been raised under the supervision of the Suljooqi Turks, slowly started to gain strength. Earlier he was the ruler of Mosul and upper Aljazirah. Over a period of time he strategically occupied the small territories around him and laid the foundation of a united state comprising of Syria, Aljazirah and Kurdistan.

Imaduddin Zangi was strict in the implementation of state policy. He established a legal system wherein the poor could seek justice. The Sultan was conscientious about his heavy responsibilities, diligent by nature, and kept a ready watch on the military moves of the west. He admired and encouraged the same traits in others. Not only did he have to contend with internal dissensions but the external onslaughts of the Crusaders as well.

The Sultan was busy with his military expeditions when a freed slave of his, taking advantage of an opportunity, murdered him. His son Nooruddin Zangi incidentally proved to be a more able general than his father. During his reign, he constantly encountered attacks from the Crusaders. They were an aggressive lot and wherever they found a weak front, they would waste no opportunity to instigate an assault to occupy the territory.

Incidentally, the Crusaders captured Asqalan which posed a serious threat to Egypt. There, the rule of the Fatimid Caliphate was on the decline. The situation was so grave that the state

power had become a pastime among the nobles and the ministers. The Crusaders had been eyeing the Fatimid treasures and wanted to capture the valley of the Nile, hence they began skirmishes on the borders of Egypt.

Historical Background of the Crusades

Who were the Crusaders? Why did they engage in constant combat with the Muslims? What were their objectives? Till we answer these questions, we cannot appreciate the achievements of Salahuddin Ayyubi.

Baitul Maqdas had been conquered during the caliphate of Umar (RA). This was the beginning of Muslims' direct confrontation with the Christian world. It is a historical fact that Umar (RA) and subsequent caliphs treated their non-Muslim subjects in an honourable manner. Their places of worship and the pilgrims were always given respect and protection. This benevolent and tolerant attitude was continued by succeeding rulers till the emergence of the Banu Fatima Dynasty. When the House of Banu Fatima took possession of Syria and Jerusalem, the Christians were not treated well. On the other hand, moral decadence had crept into Christian society because of which their pilgrims would destroy peace and order wherever they went. Hence the government chose to deal with the hostile elements sternly.

One of the pilgrims by the name of Peter the Hermit was prejudiced against the Muslims. He was frustrated because of the harsh treatment meted out to him in Palestine and his mind festered with hatred for a long time. According to Peter himself, once when he was prostrating at the grave of Jesus, he heard the voice of Jesus urging him to stand up and propagate the difficulties of the people of Christ. Peter perceived that Jesus further advised that this was the opportune time for Christians living in Muslims territories to get some respite and the time to capture back the holy places.

This vision of the Christ gave Peter the impetus to move ahead at lightning speed. He approached the Pope Urban II and suggested his plan for the conquest of Syria and Jerusalem. The Pope welcomed the suggestion and made Peter responsible for propagating the message. Peter went from town to town, highlighting the miserable condition of the Christians. He would gain their sympathy and support by making emotional appeals, by waving the cross blindly, by thumping his chest in agony and grief, and by moaning and wailing his heart out. A large group of people became his followers and they were of the opinion that he was a messenger from God.

Meanwhile, the Roman Emperor, who was afraid of losing Constantinople to the Turks, sent an envoy to the Pope requesting military help. In return, the Emperor promised vast treasures of the Roman Empire. The first council established for this purpose proved fruitless. The second council was convened which met ten times. There was such a large concentration of priests and chiefs in these gatherings that the city walls could barely contain them. The emotionally charged sermons given by the Pope and Peter threw the masses into a frenzy, the effect of which lasted for many centuries. This burning desire would not be extinguished even after consuming the blood of hundreds of thousands of men. When the council concluded, the populace echoed with the words 'this is God's will'. An army was mustered and sent forth on the day that Jesus was raised up to the Heavens. This war thus came to be called the Crusade.

The First and Second Crusades

The movements to 'free up' Syria and Jerusalem from Muslims sent the Christian world into a wave of emotional and military activity. The saints and priests came out of seclusion from their sanctuaries. The sages came out of the forests. Dacoits and thieves repented for their sins and got hold of the cross. Thus a

large number of people from all walks of life – labourers, aristocrats, traders – left their occupations for the moment and joined the multitude of crusaders for the greater cause.

Fathers would lead their sons by the hand and ask them to fight for Jesus until death or victory. To the extent that slave women and children also joined the throng. Peter the Hermit was now surrounded by a horde of several hundred thousand. They did not wait for the official army to join them and marched forth in the spring of 1096 A.D. On the way they were joined by crowds of villagers who wanted to support this mission.

The first army of Crusaders was sent under the command of Walter the Pennyless. This was not an organized infantry led by a capable general but more like a huge gathering of religious extremists and emotionally charged Christians . In the beginning they were received warmly and cheered on by the inhabitants of the cities and villages they passed through. However, when they reached Bulgaria, the local people there who were not devout Christians refused to give them free rations. The ill-organized contingent were offended and turned aggressive against the Bulgarians. In the ensuing fight, the whole brigade was obliterated.

The next contingent that included 40,000 men and women was sent under the command of Peter himself. Peter was a hermit and thus inexperienced in worldly matters. He could not arrange sufficient provisions for the journey, with the result that the army had to resort to supplication and begging in order to survive. When they reached the site where the Bulgarians had annihilated the previous band of soldiers, they were filled with anger and vengefully attacked and killed 7,000 locals. When the Caesar of Rome heard about this mishap he was so alarmed that he sent an army aboard ships to take them across the Bosphorus.

These Crusaders openly committed excesses on thousands of

Muslims as soon as they stepped into the Asian continent. They snatched children from the laps of anguished mothers and slew them. In blind prejudice they unleashed a wave of terror on the inhabitants. Under the banner of the Crusades, they committed such horrors that one trembles at the carnage they wrought. These militants were eventually confronted in a battle by Qaleej Arsalan who gave them a crushing defeat.

The third group of crusaders emerged from Germany. They were ignorant and crude. Instead of focusing on their mission, they lost sight of their goals and started looting, plundering and killing the people they passed on the way. Tired of their pillage and ransacking, the Hungarians taught them a lesson and the vast plains of Belgrade were strewn with the dead bodies of the Crusaders.

These unsuccessful attempts were not enough to discourage the European nations. They were in fact filled with even more zeal to continue with the mission. In 1097 A.D. the small kingdoms of Europe put together a formidable force including an infantry of 500,000 and a cavalry of 100,000. After one year of facing terrible hardships encompassing epidemics and famine, the army succeeded in conquering Antarkiya in mid 1098 A.D. which provided the stepping stone for future conquests in the East. A year later, Jerusalem also succumbed to their onslaught. For the next few weeks, enmasse killings were witnessed in the city. In Masjid al Aqsa alone, 70,000 Muslims were butchered. The courtyard of the mosque was knee deep in blood. A council announced death penalties for the surviving Muslims. Some were thrown brutally from rooftops, others were burnt to death, and dead bodies piled up everywhere. A small number of Muslims were fortunate enough to be able to escape this dreadful fate. They eventually appeared before the Caliph in the court of Baghdad and gave a horror-stricken account of the massacre in Jerusalem. Unfortunately they did not receive much from the court except a discouraging response, a show of

sympathy and false promises.

For the next thirty years, the Muslim and Christian forces were constantly at war with each other. The Christians continued the onslaught despite regular defeats. The year 1131 A.D. saw a strong government in place at Jerusalem. They had managed to annex the territories of Akka, Sur and Tarablus from Egyptian rule. On the other hand, the Muslim monarchs had been weakened due to constant battles amongst themselves as well as with the Christians. Only four cities of Halb, Hums, Hamat and Damascus were left on the Egyptians frontiers; even these were exposed to constant danger and were in no state to withstand an attack. Muslim trade caravans had long since ceased to operate because of Christian raids. The streets posed a deserted look. The cities that were yet unconquered would give a tax to the Christians in order to appease them.

It was at this time that Imaduddin Zangi came into power. First he united Muslim ranks by confronting all Muslim chiefs. Then he turned his focus towards the Christians. After conquering territories on the way, he finally conquered the province of Edisa. He gained a lot of prominence in Muslim circles and on the orders of the caliph in Baghdad, his name was mentioned in the invocations during Friday sermons. The conquests of Imaduddin Zangi were escalating when he was abruptly murdered in his sleep by a slave. His son Nooruddin Zangi ascended the throne, and proved to be a brave and undeterred general like his father. He was not one to be a mere observer and followed in his father's footsteps.

The Christians could not reconcile with the loss of the province of Edisa easily and in retaliation they conducted a covert night operation. Unfortunately for them, they fell into their own trap and at the hands of Nooruddin they suffered a humiliating defeat.

These appalling conditions inspired some priests to again

approach the European nations to identify the imminent dangers from the Zangi clan. Their scheme proved to be successful and a preacher called St. Bernard fired the Christian countries with enthusiasm for the Crusade. The Kings of France and Germany promised to lend military support for the cause. In this second crusade, the King of Germany led a huge army. The Muslims at the frontiers of Qonea caught him unawares. He was overwhelmed and forced to return to his country. Next the Emperor of France proceeded with his army with the conquest of Damascus in mind. This city had considerably weakened through the ages but the Muslim inhabitants did not concede defeat easily. After a long drawn-out war and several sieges, the French army was exhausted and was forced to return to Europe. This was the end of the Second Crusade.

Nooruddin Zangi conquered the city of Damascus and appointed Sher Koh as the ruler, who was incidentally the uncle of Salahuddin Ayyubi. Najamuddin, the father of Salahuddin, was already a close comrade and special advisor of the Sultan. Hence a constant link was created between Salahuddin and the royal court.

The Christians were not ready to sit complacently and watch. They captured Asqalan which was under the Egyptian caliphate. They kept a vigilant eye on Egypt which had weakened considerably and was in dire straits. In those days, a popular minister named Shawar Saadi, who had become very powerful, was banished from Egypt due to some reason. He promptly appeared in the court of Nooruddin Zangi, and complained of the mistreatment meted out to him. Sultan Zangi had been anxiously aware of the faltering state of Egypt. He decided to send a force under the command of Sher Koh (uncle of Salahuddin Ayyubi) to assist Shawar. Sher Koh was successful in his effort and Egypt fell into his hands. Unfortunately, Shawar did not honour the commitment that he would pay one-third of the state's income to Sher Koh's army and he asked him

to leave Egypt. Not only that, he also threatened to seek help from the Crusaders, who promptly sent an expedition led by Emmalurk, the French king of Jerusalem.

Sher Koh was forced to retreat into a fortress along with a handful of soldiers. When Nooruddin Zangi heard of the breach of promise and the arrival of the Crusader king, he laid siege to and then captured a city called Haaram which was located near Antakia and Tarablus and was under Christian control. When the Crusader army in Egypt heard the news, they rapidly lifted their siege and retreated. Sher Koh was able to return to the court of Nooruddin in Damascus with his regiment. He convinced Nooruddin of the susceptible and vulnerable position of the Egyptian state. It was obvious that if they did not advance to take over the country, it would be besieged by the Christian forces. The Sultan agreed and prepared for the attack. This time, Salahuddin accompanied his uncle in the expedition to Egypt.

Meanwhile, the Crusaders had lined up at a place called Baneen. The ensuing battle was incredible, with a few thousand Muslim soldiers giving a crushing defeat to the Christians. In retaliation, the Crusaders laid siege to Alexandria in Egypt. Salahuddin Ayyubi and his army managed to save the city with great courage. Subsequently, Sher Koh also conquered neighbouring areas. Ultimately a peace accord was signed by both parties and the armies returned peacefully to their countries.

As soon as Sher Koh returned to his territory, the Christians dishonoured their agreement. They made a pact with Shawar whereby they were allowed to retain their representative in Cairo and maintain an army in Egypt on state expense. Now a new series of outrages were launched against the Muslims. The Fatimid Caliph, a mere puppet, again besieged Nooruddin Zangi for help. The Sultan dispatched a force under the command of

Sher Koh. This was the same expedition in which Salahuddin Ayyubi had unwillingly accompanied his uncle. On hearing the news of the approaching army, the Crusaders fled from Egypt. The Muslim army was welcomed with fanfare by the Fatimid Caliph Aazid and the local Egyptians. On the orders of the Caliph, the miscreant Shawar was beheaded and Sher Koh was declared the Prime Minister and Commander in Chief of the armed forces. Incidentally, Sher Koh died after just two months of this expedition.

As Prime Minister of Egypt

After the death of Sher Koh, Caliph Aazid's attention turned towards his young nephew who had already impressed him with his military prowess. Hence Saladuddin was appointed the Prime Minister of Egypt. He was given the title of Malik un Nasir (The Helpful Ruler).

After assuming the high post, Salahuddin became more focused and responsible. To develop friendlier relations with his subordinates, he became very generous with his spending. This helped him gain popularity with the masses, the nobility and the government officials. He sought the company of religious scholars. Instead of occupying the luxurious palaces, he settled for a small house. Salahuddin patronized the righteous scholars and Imams and ignored the Shiite element present in Egypt. This created resentment among the Shiite scholars; as a result, they launched a covert campaign against Salahuddin. Fortunately, this operation was discovered in due time and promptly dealt with.

This underground scheme was not yet fully crushed when Salahuddin was informed of yet another Crusade attack from the Christians of Jerusalem. They first laid siege to Damiat but nature intervened and a terrible storm destroyed their entire fleet. Severe rains uprooted their tents, the soldiers insisted on lifting the siege in order to turn back and the king was forced to

return to Europe with a failed mission.

Now Salahuddin Ayyubi was able to lay the foundation of a stable empire in Egypt. After some time, the Fatimid Caliph Aazid also passed away; that was the end of the Fatimid Dynasty in Egypt. During this time, there arose some misunderstanding between Salahuddin and Nooruddin Zangi, but this was resolved with the timely intervention by the former's father, Najmuddin. In 1173 A.D., Najmuddin succumbed to death.

Barely a year passed by when the news of the untimely death of the celebrated Nooruddin Zangi shocked the Muslim world. In the history of Muslim rulers, very few equal Sultan Nooruddin in terms of justice, benevolence, astuteness, piety and struggle in the way of Allah. Unfortunately, his successor to the throne was an 11 year old boy named Swaleh, who was totally under the influence of a few nobles in the court. Swaleh had to leave Egypt for Damascus as the situation deteriorated due to continued infighting among the nobles and the ministers. One of these aristocrats, Saaduddin Gumushtageen, subsequently led the boy from Damascus to Halb, leaving the city undefended against the onslaught of the Christian forces. The Christians were always on the lookout for an opportunity to attack and they immediately surrounded the city. The helpless citizens of Damascus paid a heavy ransom to lift the siege and they implored Salahuddin for assistance. It would be relevant o mention that Salahuddin had issued a coin in Egypt bearing Swaleh's name in order to prove his allegiance to the new Sultan.

Salahuddin Ayyubi reached Damascus in great consternation amid welcoming cries of the inhabitants who gratefully threw open the city gates for him. Instead of turning towards the Sultan's palace, he made his way to his father's house. He sent reassuring messages to Swaleh about his noble intention of

saving the city from disaster. Regretfully, he received taunts in return from the young Sultan who accused him of being a turncoat and an ingrate.

Salahuddin, filled with rage, took to Halb in order to prove his innocence to the young Caliph. Alas, Gumushtageen had poisoned his ears against Salahuddin. When he reached the city, Swaleh came to the market of Halb on horseback. He appealed to the inhabitants to save him from the malevolence of the ingrate, Salahuddin. The city dwellers actually sympathized with Swaleh and fought against Salahuddin but were obviously no match for him. Inspite of repeated proposals aimed at reconciliation, Salahuddin was not able to gain the favour of the Atabuk royal family. However, he retained his possession of Halb in order to save Syria from the Crusaders' threat.

Time after time, there were attacks from the Atabuk front, and they even sought the help of some extreme religious elements to eliminate Salahuddin, but all these attempts proved abortive. The majority of the Atabuks now accepted his control. In 1175 AD, the Caliph of Baghdad honoured him with the royal dress, signifying his acceptance of him as the ruler of Egypt and Syria. In 1181 A.D., within a year after the death of Swaleh, the heads of Western Asian states had accepted the leadership of Salahuddin Ayyubi. This included the Turkish ruler of Qonea and the sovereign of Armenia.

Salahuddin and the Crusades

During this entire period, the Crusaders had been clashing with Salahuddin from time to time. Immediately after the death of Sultan Nooruddin Zangi, the King of Jerusalem conspired with the emperor of Constantinople and attacked Egypt but they met with a crushing defeat.

Similar attacks by the Crusaders did not let Salahuddin rest in peace. If he relaxed his guard against them, they would lose no

opportunity to advance into Muslim territories. Hence a portion of the armed forces was always on high alert.

In 1178 A.D., the Sultan left Egypt with a view to conquer Asqalan and Gaza. When he reached Asqalan, he did not find an opposing force and the army dispersed in the city. Meanwhile, the Christians were able to muster a force against the Muslims. During the battle, the strategy adopted by the Muslim army failed and they were badly routed. The Sultan himself escaped with a few soldiers and lost his way in the desert. After a few days of hunger and thirst, he reached Egypt with great difficulty. The Muslim army had suffered heavy casualties and in retaliation, the Sultan attacked the Christian king Baldon and defeated him. He captured the newly erected Fortress Jacob. The king was left with no other choice but to seek peace with the captors. The Sultan agreed to his plea for a settlement which was to be in effect for a period of two years.

During this entire time, a man called Reginald continued to scheme against the Muslims. He married the widows of different Christian nobles at various instances and gained prominence. He launched skirmishes on the borders of Antakia and Kurk. He would spread mass terror by attacking the suburban towns of Kurk on a regular basis. He would plunder the passing caravans of pilgrims on the way to Makkah for Hajj, imprison women and children, and mercilessly kill innocent people. The Sultan complained of these horrific acts to Baldon several times, without resorting to aggression in view of the peace treaty. When these grievances were not addressed, Salahuddin was forced to take a bolder step. At the same time, the news started circulating about the sea and land forces that Reginald had mustered to fulfill his evil intentions towards Makkah and Madina – the holy places of Muslims. The Sultan wasted no time in sending a naval fleet from Egypt after the fleet of Reginald, while he sent his army from Syria to combat the land forces. The Christian militants had reached a place

called Rabigh when they were overcome by the Muslim forces and completely annihilated.

A year passed before Reginald gathered the nerve to muster another fleet in order to launch an offensive against Madina via the Sea of Qulzum. The Muslim Admiral Lou Lou chased the Christian naval armada and unnerved the soldiers who were terrified when they saw the Muslim fleet approaching. They descended on the shores of a town and tried to hide in the mountains. The Muslim navy pursued them and did not spare a single enemy; only Reginald managed to escape yet another time. On reaching Kurk, he once again got busy in preparing future militant activities.

This time the Sultan personally wanted to take to task the miscreant for casting evil glances towards Makkah and Madina. Along with his forces Salahuddin reached the fortress of Reginald. The soldiers of the enemy rushed into the fortress and pulled the drawbridge up so that no one could cross. The Muslim ranks besieged the fort and installed their tanks near the trenches. On the night of the attack a wedding was taking place within the fort between the Queen's sister Isabelle and a relative of Reginald's. The soft-hearted Sultan asked his brigade to avoid attacking the tower which housed the bridal couple. The siege continued for a month. The ruler of Tibriya, Raymond, reached the fortress with reinforcements. He contracted a peace agreement for five years with the Sultan. Contented, Salahuddin lifted the siege and returned.

Predictably, Reginald, true to his nature, started instigations against Muslims yet another time. He looted a large trading caravan which was passing through and imprisoned them. When the Sultan pressed for their release, he showed indifference and had the audacity to plunder yet another party of Hajj pilgrims. When the pilgrims appealed he asked them to call their Prophet Muhammad (SAW) for help. Then he

martyred a number of pilgrims.

All these alarming incidents were enough to galvanize the Sultan into action. This was the straw that broke the camel's back. His patience had been tested far too many times and he vowed to kill Reginald with his own hands.

In 1187 A.D. Sultan Salahuddin advanced with his forces towards Tibriya. The Christian ranks organized themselves at the springs of Safooriya. They did not want to leave their positions in order to engage in battle with the Sultan. The Sultan demonstrated brilliant military prowess and conquered Tibriya with ease. Also present in the city were Raymond's wife and children. This news caused furor among the Christian ranks. They were forced to advance and meet the Muslim army. They had to march the whole day in hot sultry weather, so at night they fell into a deep slumber.

To help our readers understand the events better it is important to explain that when the Christian king of Jerusalem Amori died, he left an ill and weak lad Baldon who was not capable of running the affairs of the state. The prevailing council therefore appointed Raymond, the governor of Tarablus, as his patron. Later on, except for a specific area of Jerusalem, Baldon handed over the entire state to his brother-in-law Guy. Tensions between Raymond and Guy continued for some time until the opposition of Muslims and the need to fight against them compelled the two to unite.

The next day both forces confronted each other in battle. When the battle commenced, the Christian soldiers advanced forward with their special cross which they believed was constructed from the same wood that was used to create the cross on which Jesus had been crucified. However, they could not stand the onslaught of the Muslim army. Their steps faltered, but the cross renewed their motivation to fight. They kept returning with renewed vigour, but not for long. The Muslim cavalry

fought aggressively and the enemy was forced to retreat. By night time, the Crusaders were exhausted. In the morning, the Muslim ranks wreaked havoc on them and most of the Christian army was killed on the battlefield. The rest were imprisoned. Only Raymond was able to escape with a small brigade.

This victory was so profound and absolute that it broke the back of the Crusading forces. The Christian army had suffered heavy casualties despite the use of heavy armour covering their whole bodies. It had been a daunting task for the Muslims. Not only did they have to first kill the horses forcing the riders to be thrown off but they had to then pierce through the iron vests that shielded the soldiers. Yet the prisoners were so many that 30 to 40 of them were tied by one rope and each Muslim soldier was expected to guard 100-200 prisoners.

After the victory, a court was summoned by the Sultan. All the prisoners were presented before him. The king of Jerusalem, Guy, was also present among them, along with his brother, Reginald and other important nobles. The king was trembling with fear. Salahuddin treated him respectfully when he saw his condition. He ordered cold water for the king, who drank a few sips and gave the rest to Reginald. The Sultan rebuked him for passing on the glass to Reginald and commented that he would not have done such a thing. Sultan Salahuddin meant that there would be no clemency shown to Reginald. This was the man who hated Muslims and Islam from the core of his heart. He was willing to go to any lengths to fulfill his mal-intent. Time and again he had made offensive remarks against the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Not once had he abided by the agreements that he had enacted with the Muslim nations. Now was the time for retribution. Nothing could stop the Sultan from fulfilling his intention. The Sultan reminded him of his insults in a thunderous tone, and proclaimed to be the one who would defend the honour of the Prophet (SAW). Then the criminal was asked his will regarding the acceptance of Islam. When

Reginald refused, the Sultan severed his head with his sword.

When King Guy saw the fate that his friend suffered, he panicked. He thought he was second in line for execution. But the Sultan reassured him by affirming that kings don't execute kings and that Reginald had crossed all bounds of propriety. He showed a similar attitude to the nobles who were taken as captives. All were shown clemency and were duly escorted to Damascus.

The Muslim army camped for just one day after the conquest of Hitin, a place close to Tibriya. Then they spread throughout the country like a flood. After the fall of Tibriya and Akka, 500 more destinations were conquered with ease. Most of these were acquired through peace agreements. The entire territory of Palestine, from Beirut in the north to Gaza in the south fell to the Muslims in a matter of two months. The Christians had taken almost a century to conquer the same but with much warfare and bloodshed. Now the only cities in their control were Jerusalem and Sur.

Bait ul Maqdas – The Jewel in the Crown

After numerous conquests, the time had come for the Sultan to conquer Jerusalem. This had been the greatest desire of the Sultan for a long time and the purpose of his life. For this last milestone, he tried to unite the Muslim governments of different countries.

The Sultan undertook large scale measures to prepare for the onslaught. The scholars and the intellectuals were asked to join the struggle. The Sultan started his journey in the name of Allah. At some distance form Bait ul Maqdas, Sultan Salahuddin rendered such an inspiring speech that he mesmerized the army and the nobles accompanying him. He vowed to fight till the end – till Bait ul Maqdas bore the flag of Islam; till he had followed in the footsteps of the Prophet

(SAW) and conquered the Dome of the Rock.

On the other side, 20,000 Crusaders were ready to battle inside the fortress. Queen Subul and Princess Isabelle had united after resolving their differences. The refugees from nearby conquered areas had also gathered in the fortress.

The Sultan reached Bait ul Maqdas on 15 Rajab in 583 Hijri and addressed the fortified Christians. He declared that this city was as holy to him as it was to them. He had not come here to shed blood. If they agreed to surrender the city to him without a fight, he would allow the Christians to carry on with their lives peacefully under a nominal tax system. This generous offer was rejected.

For the next five days, Salahuddin busied himself in organizing his armed forces. On Friday, the 20th of Rajab, he installed his catapults in strategic places and rearranged his archers. An attack was launched on the fortress and massive efforts were made to damage the thick fortified walls. The Muslim soldiers succeeded in making cracks in the fortress walls, whose foundations were weakened by putting burning cotton cloth into it. Thus the fearless Muslim army succeeded in entering the fortress amid a shower of arrows.

This brave entry and daring behaviour of the Muslim forces caused disorder and despair among the Christian ranks. They had no other choice but to surrender and appeal to the Sultan in the name of God; the same God on whose creation they had no mercy 91 years back. Sultan was not interested in gaining wealth or territory. Thus, he let the Christians leave the city peacefully on very easy terms.

The next day a strange sight was witnessed. A never-ending trail of men, women and children was peacefully making its way out of the city along with their entire belongings and weaponry. First to lead were the priests who carried the

treasures and jewels of the church with them. These ornaments and riches were so valuable that one could only guess their value. The next procession saw Queen Subul with her entire possessions and servants, restored to her pristine glory. The Sultan himself came to see her off. Some 10,000 poor citizens of Jerusalem could not afford to pay the tax that had been agreed to in the peace accord so the the generous Sultan offered to pay it himself.

Some women came wailing and mourning to the Sultan, begging him to release their men who had been taken prisoners in the Battle of Hitin and later skirmishes. They had no one to support them. Salahuddin, being tender-hearted, released their husbands, brothers and sons.

The Sultan's glance fell on some people who were carrying their old parents on their shoulders. He ordered the special Christian unit called Hospitlars to take care of the sick and wounded. Salahuddin respected the sentiments of the defeated inhabitants and did not enter the city till they had all departed.

It was a blessed Friday of 583 Hijri when Bait ul Maqdas fell to the Muslims after 91 years. The Sultan received congratulatory messages in his tent, his face radiant with happiness. The Qaris recited the Quran and the poets read out beautiful verses celebrating the event. Sultan Salahuddin composed more than 70 letters to heads of the Muslim states and other officials informing them of the victory Allah had granted them. The longest letter was written to the Caliph in Baghdad.

Bait ul Maqdas had undergone a massive transformation over the century. There were statues and figurative drawings on the walls which had erased the whole concept of the Oneness of Allah. The Dome of the Rock had been hidden by slabs of marble. The Muslims were sorrowful at witnessing this state of the mosque. The Sultan renovated the mosque and had it restored to its pristine glory. On his orders the mosque was

washed with rose water, and decorated for the congregational prayer. The next Friday was a day of jubilation and a demonstration of the power and prestige for the Muslim world. The mosque was filled to capacity with worshippers. The Sultan beckoned Qazi Muhiyuddin to deliver the Friday sermon. The Qazi mentioned the historical background and significance of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and thanked Allah for the decisive victory over the Christians. His words were so poignant and soulful that the entire congregation wept with emotion. Then the beautiful and expensive pulpit that Nooruddin Zangi had especially built 23 years back for his desired victory over Bait ul Maqdas was fitted into place. Unfortunately he died without seeing his dream fulfilled; instead Allah blessed his successor Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi with this ultimate triumph.

After the conquest of Bait ul Maqdas, Sultan Salahuddin turned his attention to Tartoos and Antakia. In both cases, he remained triumphant. According to Herald Lamb, "Salahuddin conquered Antakia with the ease of a farmer harvesting a ripe crop."

In the month of Ramadan that year, the Sultan carried on with his jihad activities and managed to capture the famous fort in Kurk where Reginald had sought refuge and which had become the launching pad of his sinister advances towards Muslims. Then, Salahuddin returned to Bait ul Maqdas and spent the rest of Ramadan in worship there.

The Third Crusade

When the news of Salahuddin's expeditions and conquests of Christian holds reached Europe, there was an uproar and a wave of anger rose up against the Muslims. King Guy, the former king of Jerusalem, who had been pardoned and freed by the Sultan earlier, now went back on his word, and started to amass an army along with volunteers. He started preparations against the might of Salahuddin. The Christian forces laid siege to the city of Akka. This was the start of a series of battles called The

Third Crusade. The events are presented below in brief.

When the Sultan reached Akka with his forces, the city was already under siege. Salahuddin positioned his soldiers around the Christian army. The city was surrounded by the Christians while they were surrounded by the Muslims. There were regular skirmishes between the two forces. One day the Crusaders launched a surprisingly mighty assault on the Sultan's army which could not bear the strength of the attack and many including leading military officials were martyred on the Muslim side. However, the Muslim forces stabilized and reassembled themselves. Now the tables were turned and the Crusaders lost close to ten thousand soldiers. The stench and atrophied bodies gave rise to a plague; the Sultan had to retreat with his men for a while.

In the next phase the inhabitants of Akka were engulfed in a new difficulty. The Crusaders made tower like structures and stepladders (made of fire proof material) higher than the walls of the city. Their catapults were positioned on these towers. Whosoever stepped in their line of fire was not spared. The Muslims had to look for a quick solution. An engineer from Damascus had an ingenious idea. He prepared a special explosive which when hurled at the ladders set fire to them. Hence this strategic weapon of the enemy was rendered incapable.

The residents of Akka and the Sultan's army were rejoicing at this success when they received the news that the kings of Europe, including Germany's Frederick, France's Philip and England's Richard, are marching towards them with their armies. Salahuddin pondered over the situation and sought help from the Muslim rulers. However, none came forward and he could only rely on military succour from his own empire. Inspite of the Sultan's smaller army,, the Crusaders were defeated comprehensively in the next few battles by the grace of

Allah. Also, there were reports that the old German king who was coming to fight against the Sultan had died by drowning. His armed forces disintegrated and most of the soldiers returned to their homeland.

The next challenge was posed by the French King Philip who had marched forward with an army. The city of Akka had now been under siege for about a year. Fresh battalions added strength to the Christian army. Once again a battle ensued. The Sultan's army and the citizens of Akka fought bravely and crushed the force of the French Crusaders. This provided some relief to the Muslim camps. However, it proved short-lived and was followed by a mighty force led by King Richard of England. This was the same Richard who is called Richard the Lionheart in the annals of history because of his feats of bravery. Philip and Richard were not on common ground and did not share a harmonious relationship. Philip lost hope after being defeated at the hands of the Muslims and returned. However, he left behind most of his forces for combat in Akka.

The fresh reinforcements brought by Richard succeeded in weakening the fortified wall around the city of Akka. The citizens of the city were almost starved but still continued to fill the gaps made in the walls. They constantly heaved fireballs at the Crusaders to make them retreat. The Sultan was fighting one army after the other. The Crusaders were badly routed in most cases. But now a plague and famine in the city forced the dwellers to request a settlement with the invaders. After a long period of three years, the Christian army managed to take over the city of Akka. For this, they had to sacrifice the lives of one hundred and twenty thousand soldiers.

Many bloody battles took place between Richard and Salahuddin. In most of the battles, Richard suffered a heavy defeat. But he was so brave and undeterred that his soldiers would be constantly inspired by his courage and kept on

returning to fight. Nothing would faze the European King. He made a plan to conquer Asqalan. When the Sultan got news of his intentions, he swiftly reached Asqalan first and evacuated the city. He overwhelmed the Crusaders and left King Richard stunned by his rapid advances. The king was now under the awe of the Sultan. His men were tired and worn out from the long drawn battles. Another report that worried the king was that of his brother securing the royal treasury in England. With these troubling circumstances back home, and the Sultan's determination on the other, Richard thought of returning to his country. As a last endeavor, he attempted to seize Bait ul Maqdas, but the Sultan had made prior arrangements to defend the city. The Christian army panicked and could not lay siege to the holy city. Instead, they retreated towards Ramallah. The Sultan's army hastened towards Jafa and captured it. Unfortunately there arose some differences between the Muslim ranks, and King Richard, taking advantage of the situation, managed to take Jafa back into his hold.

Now Richard and his army strongly desired to return to their homeland. Hence, peace terms were negotiated with the Sultan which favoured the Muslims. The area from Akka to Jafa remained under the command of the Christians. Richard and his soldiers marched back and in this way the third Crusade came to an end.

Death

After the peace treaty of Ramallah, Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi returned to Damascus and busied himself with affairs of the state. He made the intention for Hajj but was unable to carry out his plans. The Hajj season passed and the pilgrims started to return. The Sultan came out to welcome them in bitterly cold weather without appropriate clothing. He caught a severe cold and fell very ill. When people found out about his ailment, they began to pray for his recovery.

On the twelfth day of his illness, the Sultan spent a restless night during which he constantly listened to the recitation of the Quran. When the last verse of Surah Taubah was being recited ('*There is no god but Allah, I trust in Him only*'), Sultan Salahuddin's face broke out in a smile. He lifted the finger of Shahadah (index finger as in salah) and passed away. He was 55 years of age at the time of his death.

The news of Salahuddin's death hit the Muslim world like a tornado. The Muslim Ummah went into mourning at this great loss. The expenses for the death shroud were met by Qazi Fazil. The Muslims were overwhelmed with grief and some even fainted from weeping. The funeral prayer was carried out with great difficulty as the procession was in a state of anguish. With tears and prayers of forgiveness for their leader the grieving mourners bade the Sultan farewell on 13th March, 1193 A.D. in the Islamic month of Safar. Salahuddin was buried in the fort of Damascus along with his sword.

A Character Sketch of the Sultan

The great success story of Sultan Salahuddin can be attributed to Allah's special blessings on him. He possessed numerous noble qualities. The Sultan was a true Mujahid and the spirit of Jihad coursed through his veins. In the interest of Jihad, he said goodbye to the material world. In the words of Ibn Shidaad:

"I wrote a book on Jihad on the request of the Sultan, which was a compilation of verses from the Quran and Ahadith about the topic. The Sultan would constantly browse through this book. No amount of effort for his cause would tire him out. No expedition proved too much for him. Whether forging on in the stinging cold nights of winter, or weathering storms in the desert, nothing fazed the Sultan. When he attacked the fort of Safdar, the days were bitterly cold, the rain was intense and rapid floods were engulfing the encampment. It was difficult for the armed forces to move through the slithery mud.

Salahuddin, undeterred by the extremities of weather, stayed vigilant the entire night, and set up the catapults in strategic positions.

Similarly, during the war on Ramallah, skirmishes would erupt during the night. The tents of the Sultan and the soldiers would collapse because of the harsh wind and they would spend the entire night on horseback. Salahuddin would be so busy in handling the war issues and strategies that he would often forget to eat, drink or rest. He would be oblivious to illness and pain. He was very sick during the siege of Akka. This was the time when mighty European armies were positioned against him. The Sultan had painful sores on the lower part of his body. He could neither sit up nor lie down. In this condition he would go around organizing and motivating his forces without any hint of anguish on his face. On being questioned he commented that he was oblivious to his physical problems on horseback, but when he got off his suffering resurfaced."

1. The Spirit of Forgiveness

Generally speaking, harsh experiences in life make a person hard-hearted and callous. But Sultan Salahuddin had an extremely kind heart. He was benevolent to his subjects and to all creatures of Allah, unlike the Christian leaders who had roasted bodies of Muslim prisoners of war on skewers. The Sultan was not hungry for power or territory, nor was he filled with the fire of revenge that would make him resort to torture or cruelty. Whenever he would conquer a city, he would let the Christian citizens leave unharmed rather than kill them mercilessly. Even though he was well aware and it was his experience that the same people that he was releasing would come back to fight against him. Still, there was no change in his compassionate policies towards his defeated enemies. His words to his son give us an indication of his intent. He advised him to always fear and avoid bloodshed as blood never goes to

waste (i.e. killings always have reactions and after effects).

Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi was a principled ruler who never resorted to unfair practices for meeting his objectives. The Christian kings often went back on their agreements but the Sultan never followed suit. He always stuck to his side of the bargain, showing restraint, dealing patiently and in a dignified manner.

2. Generosity and Benevolence

The benevolence of Salahuddin is worth mentioning and well-known. After the conquest of Bait ul Maqdas, he generously distributed riches among the poor from the treasury. An adviser rebuked him for emptying the royal treasury for this wealth could have lasted a long time. The Sultan replied that he felt more comfortable in giving away money and riches that were not his own anyway. It belonged to the needy. He felt delighted in returning the rights to all who claimed them. When he would be involved in donating to the underprivileged, his face would radiate happiness. The treasurers would secretly put away some money for future emergencies, for they knew that the Sultan would distribute all the resources instantly. The one who gave so generously with both hands lived an extremely simple existence. At the time of his death, he owned just 47 dirhams and one dinar. All his life he never paid zakat because no significant amount was ever collected by him to enable him to pay it.

Salahuddin's deeds matched his words. He once said that there should be some people who consider wealth to be as flimsy as dust. Once he was taken to see a fine palace in Damascus that had been specially constructed for him. The Sultan was displeased with the endeavour and claimed that they would not live forever and that the palace was not suitable for someone who awaited death. He further commented that our purpose was to worship Allah. His practical life was a demonstration of

his beliefs and values. His tent was his palace, and the horseback was his throne.

3. Simplicity and Moderation

In his personal life, the Sultan did not care for decorum and royal etiquette. He was simple, egalitarian and undemanding to the extreme. Once in the battle of Akka he generously gifted 12,000 horses to his soldiers on their appeal. During the battle, the Sultan was seen requesting for a mount to fight on. Because of his easy-going temperament, his servants would often take him for granted and misbehave on occasions. One day, the Sultan had to request his servant for a glass of water five times. He exclaimed that he would die of thirst. Finally the insolent servant brought the water. The patient monarch drank the water silently without rebuking the man.

Once Salahuddin fell seriously ill and became very weak. He asked for water which was too hot when it was brought. The Sultan again requested for cold water but this time too he was presented with warm water. The Sultan remained silent. When this happened a third time, the Sultan simply asked the servant to tell him if he wanted to kill him.

4. Behaviour in Public Life

Sultan Salahuddin's public life is worth mentioning. He was polite and refined in conversation. His court was open to comments from all quarters. However, vulgar obscenities and personal insults were not tolerated. Even in a state of anger, the Sultan had his tongue and pen in check. The Sultan would enjoy the company of learned men and scholars. Among his favourite companions were the two celebrated scholars, Qazi Fazil and Sheikh Bahauddin.

Sultan Salahuddin was very particular about his Islamic duties. Unfortunately he could not perform Hajj despite his best efforts.

However, he did his utmost for the welfare of the pilgrims and always stood ready to welcome them on their return.

The Sultan would weep profusely while listening to the recitation from the Quran. This was the same monarch who patiently bore the vicissitudes of life. In the thick of battle, when he received the news of his son's death, he did not let anyone know of his sorrow till the battle had come to an end. It must have been a difficult test as he was an extremely loving and caring father.

5. Sense of Justice

Sultan Salahuddin was not only remarkable for his personal qualities and his mighty prowess as a general, but he was also known for his wise and just governance. He was very strict in the administration of justice. The judges in his courts were not allowed to show undue leniency to any man, whatever his religion or status. If a case was registered against him or his family, they would appear in the court as ordinary citizens for the hearing. If the Sultan would emerge victorious in any case, he would bear the expenses of the accuser and award him a royal robe to please him.

Conclusion

The Ayyubi era was known for its educational and scholarly progress. Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi had a passion for establishing Islamic schools and this fervor passed on to his successors. He introduced a scheme through which special estates were dedicated (waqf) for the running of these centres of learning. In a matter of years, the Muslim empire abounded with libraries and seminaries.

The Sultan had so many amazing qualities that one doesn't have the words to express them. Today we see the Muslim world engulfed in a similar situation as was the case in Sultan's era.

One by one, the West is gaining control of Muslim countries. The Muslim Ummah is despairing and lacking in confidence. After World War Two, when the British forces had taken over the control of Bait ul Maqdas, a British general kicked the grave of Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi and mocked, “Rise up Salahuddin, and see that we have reached here.” The Islamic world eagerly awaits a Mujahid like Salahuddin. In the words of Allama Iqbal:

‘No Rumi stood up again from the gardens of Ajam (non-Arab world), though it is the same water and soil of Iran and the same Tibriz’.

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About the Author

Naima Sohaib, 40, is the author of "Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shaksiat", a 500-page book in Urdu about twenty most prominent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author.

Naima has a Masters in Islamic Studies from University of Karachi and did her B.Sc. in Mathematics from Lahore College for Women. She has also authored several storybooks for children. She lives in Karachi with her husband and four daughters.

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IMAM IBN E TAYMIYYAH

Naima Sohaib

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

This booklet is eleventh in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by my dear friend Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. It tells us about these unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam. I hope that Muslims today will find their stories a source of inspiration, guidance and action.

This booklet is about Imam Ibne Taymiyyah – a unique individual who lived in tumultuous times in which Muslims faced unprecedented challenges. However, he remained steadfast and fought on all fronts to defend the purity of Islam and the supremacy of Quran and Sunnah. His intolerance of any view against Quran and Sunnah led him into trouble with the state and he was imprisoned many times.

Imam Ibne Taymiyyah was a man of extraordinary intelligence who mastered every field of knowledge and science of his time. His amazing power of retention was matchless among his contemporaries. He wrote numerous books on various subjects.

Every facet of his personality is a source of inspiration especially for Muslims of today who need to remain steadfast in the face of calamities and opposition from the critics of Islam.

May Allah reward Naima Sohaib for her constant encouragement and support and Sohaib Umar for patiently editing this piece of work.

Asma Farooq

Imam Ibn e Taymiyyah

The Revivalist of the 7th Century Hijri and an Outstanding Mujahid of the Pen and the Sword

Introduction

His name was Ahmad, his kunniyat Abul Abbas and his title Taqiuddin. His lineage is as follows:

Ahmed bin Abdul Haleem bin Abdus Salaam bin Abdullah bin Khizr bin Muhammad binul Khizr bin Ali bin Abdullah bin Taymiyyah al Harrani.

Although his name was Ahmad, he was famous by the name of Ibne Taymiyyah. According to some traditions Imam Ibne Taymiyyah's distant paternal grandmother was Taymiyyah who was such a learned and accomplished scholar that the whole family became associated with her name.

Birth

Ibne Taymiyyah was born on the 12th of Rabiul Awwal 661 A.H. in the historical Syrian city of Harran.

Family Background

Ibne Taymiyyah belonged to a highly intellectual family of scholars. For generations his family had gained eminence for their scholarship, piety and devotion to Islam. His paternal grandfather Abdus Salam was a well known scholar of the Hanbali school of thought and a matchless orator. He spent his entire life preaching Islam by giving lectures and writing books. Many of his literary works are still available to us.

His father Sheikh Abdul Haleem was also accomplished in the sciences of his time. After the death of his father Abdus Salam he succeeded him as the khateeb of Harran mosque and at the same time had the honor of giving sermons and lectures at Madrassa Nooria. He gained fame for his well researched sermons and his scholarly insight.

These were tumultuous times for the Muslim world as it had come under attack of the Tartars. In 667 A.H. when Ibne Taymiyyah was only six years old his hometown fell to the Tartars. In the dire conditions that prevailed his family was forced to leave home and head towards Damascus. Since there were no animals available to carry their belongings Ibne Taymiyyah's family had no choice but to leave everything behind except their books and a few essential items. The journey was full of perils and there was constant fear of attack from the Tartars. Apart from looking after the women and children on this treacherous journey Ibne Taymiyyah's father also had to pull the cart full of books due to scarcity of animals. Laden with its literary treasures the caravan finally managed to reach Damascus.

Soon the word spread that this scholarly family had arrived in Damascus. His father and grandfather had an established reputation in the field of learning and within a few days Ibne Taymiyyah's father was chosen to give sermons at Darul Hadith Sakariya. In addition, he was also appointed as the Khateeb of Jamia Masjid Umvi. It should be kept in mind that proving oneself as an intellectual and scholar in a centre of learning like Damascus was not an easy task.

Education and Upbringing

Ibne Taymiyyah had acquired his early education in Harran. After reaching Damascus he studied a range of subjects at Madrassa Hanbaliya and Darul Hadith Sakariya. He memorized the Quran in a short period. Despite his young age he used to

attend his father's lectures and take part in the scholarly discussions that ensued. Ibne Taymiyyah did not have any real interest in activities involving fun and games. Once his father was taking his children out to a recreation park but Ibne Taymiyyah chose not to join them. In the evening when they returned from the excursion his father expressed his disappointment, "Ahmad, I wish you could have gone with us; today's outing was really interesting". Ahmad replied pointing towards the book in his hand, "Father, how could I memorize this book if I went with you?" Surprised, his father asked, "Have you memorized the whole book?" Ahmad replied in the affirmative. Upon his father's request, he recited the whole book to him. His father was overjoyed and embraced him with love.

Ibne Taymiyyah's memory was so extraordinary that he needed to read a book only once in order to memorize it. While his father and grandfather also possessed great power of retention, Ibne Taymiyyah was particularly gifted and amazed his teachers by his quick and accurate memory skills. Soon he gained fame all over Damascus.

Once a religious scholar was visiting Damascus from Halb. Having learnt about Ibne Taymiyyah's great memory power he wanted to meet him and test his memory. He decided to sit on the road that led to his school so that he could meet Ibne Taymiyyah on his way back from school. On seeing him a tailor pointed towards him and told the scholar that this was the child that he had been waiting to meet. The scholar decided to put him to test with a few Ahadith. He would write a Hadith and its narrators on a small tablet, make Ibne Taymiyyah read it once, remove the tablet and then ask him to recite it. He did this numerous times with different Ahadith and their narrators and each time he would recite each and every word accurately. Seeing this the Sheikh remarked, "If this boy lives, he is going to achieve something big in life because I have never seen

anyone possess such an incredible memory."

Tafseer (interpretation) of the Quran was Ibne Taymiyyah's favorite subject which led him to study innumerable books of Tafseer. He relates himself, "Sometimes I used to study upto a hundred books of Tafseer for the explanation of one verse of the Quran. After this I would pray to Allah to grant me understanding of that verse. I would plead, 'O the Teacher of Adam and Ibrahim! Enlighten me.' I would make my way to deserted places and mosques, rub dust on my forehead and pray to Allah, 'O the One who taught Ibrahim, grant me understanding.'"

Apart from spending time on memorization and Tafseer of the Quran he also devoted time to learning Hadith sciences from over 200 scholars. He managed to study Musnad Ahmad and the six authentic books of Hadith (Saha-e-Sitta) several times with different teachers. His mastery in Hadith was such that none was comparable to him in the field. So much so that people started doubting the authenticity of a Hadith if Ibne Taymiyyah did not have knowledge of it.

He was instructed in Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) by his father who was the leading expert during that time. He also studied Fiqh under the guidance of the chief justice Abu Muhammad Abdur Rahman and renowned scholar Shaikh Zainuddin.

Ibne Taymiyyah acquired knowledge of all the prevailing sciences of his time. He paid special attention to Arabic. He became an expert in Arabic grammar, vocabulary, history of the Arabic language, literature and the poetry of the past and present writers. His mastery over Arabic grammar was proven by the fact that after thoroughly analyzing 'Alkitab' written by the leading expert of grammar Imam Saiboya, he managed to point out its mistakes and weak points. He also studied Islamic history in depth. He analyzed the conditions prevailing in the pre-Islamic era and the early Arab generations as well.

Among the scholars and general public of the time the Ashaira (a school of thought with a particular religious philosophy) were famous for their Ilm ul Kalam. The followers of the Hanbali school of thought were generally considered in opposition to Ashaira. During religious debates and dialogues the Ashaira were often more convincing with their logical and philosophical explanations while the Hanbali scholars dealt more with the apparent meaning of the Quranic verses and the Ahadith, much more than the underlying logic or philosophy. Imam Ibne Taymiyyah recognized this and did such an in-depth study of philosophy, Ilm ul Kalam and logic that he became aware of the weaknesses in these sciences and those of the scholars of Greece (who were considered the godfathers of logic and philosophy). He wrote scholarly books of such caliber critiquing these sciences that nobody could challenge them.

Ibne Taymiyyah also studied Mathematics and calligraphy. All in all, he prepared himself in every way to fulfill the need of the time; which was to prove that Islam was the religion of truth in the face of prevailing philosophies. He learnt the use of all the weapons that his opponents and critics of Islam were equipped with. Allama Zahabi writes about him, "Ahmad was still quite young when he started participating in religious discourses. His amazing display of intellect at these discussions and debates astounded many great scholars. At this time his age was 19 years or less."

Hafiz Sirajuddin writes in his book, "There was hardly any book pertaining to arts and sciences that Ahmad was not familiar with. It seemed that Ahmad was the only one that was bestowed by Allah with an amazing power of retention and the gift of remembering everything he read."

The Imam was around 19 years old when after seeing his extraordinary aptitude and abilities, the chief justice of Syria Sharfuddin Abul Abbas Ahmad al Maqdasi gave him the

authority to issue Fatwa (religious verdict).

Ibne Taymiyyah Starts Teaching

When Ibne Taymiyyah was 21 years old, his father Abdul Haleem passed away. He was chosen to succeed his father as the Shaikh ul Hadith at Dar ul Hadith Sakariya. On 2nd Muharram 683 A.H. he delivered his first sermon. As was the tradition, scholars, chief justice and the nobility of the city were present at the inaugural sermon. This was a difficult test that every new teacher had to go through.

In this lecture the Imam discussed the different attributes of 'Bismillah' with such eloquence that it left his audience thoroughly impressed with his vast knowledge, discerning intellect, way of argumentation and delivery. People realized that the Imam was blessed with extraordinary abilities and was poised to accomplish something great.

The following month Imam Sahib gave a lecture on Tafseer (Quranic interpretation) at Jamiah Umvi in place of his father. Ibne Kathir writes that while delivering his Tafseer lectures he would extensively refer from modern sciences and contemporary knowledge of the time. This made him highly popular and the number of attendees grew every day. Soon his fame spread far and wide.

The primary basis of his Tafseer was different verses of the Quran (since some verses of the Quran explain the other verses), followed by Ahadith, and then the sayings of the Prophet's companions. Instead of false and fabricated narrations his speeches would be supported by facts from the life of the Prophet (SAW) and the companions. His deep insight disclosed so many new facts that weeks would be spent on a single verse of the Quran. It took him years to finish the Tafseer of Surah Nur.

Hafiz Sirajuddin Hafs Omar writes, “When Imam Taymiyyah would start his lecture Allah would open for him the gates of knowledge, wisdom and insight. He supported every claim with verses from the Quran, Ahadith, sayings of the scholars and verses of the Arab poets. His words would flow like the waves of the sea. During the sermon he would keep his eyes closed. All the people present would be awe struck by his dignified personality. When he would open his eyes after the sermon it seemed as if he had just returned from another world.”

For 15 years he taught in total peace. In 695 A.H. after the death of Sheikh Zain ul Abideen (the most notable scholar of the Hanbali school of thought) Imam Sahib was appointed as Sheikh ul Hadith in Dar ul Hadith Hanbaliya. At a time when Ibne Taymiyyah was busy in his ideological Jihad his country once again came under the attack of Tartars and he proved his excellence in the field of Jihad with the sword in addition to Jihad with the tongue.

The Mischief of the Tartars

The unfortunate events that befell the Islamic world in the seventh century were unprecedented in the annals of history. The Muslims had become negligent and unmindful of their faith; Allah’s fury thus descended upon them in the form of the Tartars.

Let us briefly narrate what led to the start of these unfortunate events. The Tartars originally came from Mongolia, a part of the Gobi desert, a barren area with hardly any sign of civilization. The Tartars were wild and barbaric; they used to eat dog meat and use animal skin to cover themselves. Their various tribes were often at war amongst themselves, until the time that Genghis Khan managed to subdue most of the tribal chiefs and strengthened his rule. His empire gradually spread from the Gobi desert to China and Turkmenistan. He also gave significant boost to the progress and development of the Tartars.

During this time, Allaudin Mohammad Khwarzam Shah had a vast empire in the eastern part of the Islamic world. In order to establish trade relations Genghis Khan sent a delegation of merchants whom Khwarzam Shah killed without any solid reason. When an emissary was sent to enquire about this massacre, even he was killed by Khwarzam Shah. This news enraged Genghis Khan. He climbed up a hill and in solitude reflected on this whole incident. Burning with anger he returned to his people and said, “There cannot be two rulers on land just like there cannot be two suns in the sky.”

Genghis Khan gathered a huge army and attacked Khwarzam Shah. Soon his army gained control of Bokhara, Samarkand, Ray, Hamdan, Zanjan and Nishapur. He destroyed whatever came his way and moved on. Even though Khwarzam Shah was at that time the most powerful ruler in the Islamic world, the terror of the Tartars had him on the run. He eventually reached an island where he died and did not even get a proper burial.

The attacks by the Tartars not only humiliated the Muslims but the entire Islamic world was shaken from its foundations by their terror. No other nation had ever faced such destruction. The Tartars were a barbaric nation and brought about a lot of destruction. Entire cities would be torched and their population killed without making any exception for women, children and the elderly. They would slit open the stomachs of pregnant women and kill their children. Such events had terrified the Muslims and they were overcome with shame and dejection. Combating and defeating the Tartars seemed impossible and unbelievable to the Muslims. Cowardice had set in to the extent that a solitary Tartar soldier would walk into a village and single handedly kill the people like sheep and cattle, and no one had the courage to stand up against him.

While Muslims were the main victims, the effects of these horrific events were felt by the entire civilized world which was

shaken by the destruction caused by the Tartars. They did not let harsh weather conditions, mountains, seas, famine or plague stand in their way.

After Genghis Khan's death his sons and grandsons continued with the wave of destruction that he had unleashed. In 656 A.H. Genghis Khan's grandson Halaku Khan invaded Baghdad, the most advanced city of the world. It was also the metropolis of the Islamic world and a centre of learning. Baghdad was a marvelous city such that its gardens, markets, houses, factories and educational institutions were unparalleled in the world. However, at the same time there was great moral decay in the society. When Caliph Moatasim received the news that Halaku Khan was approaching Baghdad, he was busy enjoying music surrounded by his beautiful slave girls. His minister Ibne Alqamee, a traitor, deceived him into believing that there was no danger. On the other hand the state of the religious scholars was such that at the time of the attack they were busy debating whether Burraq, the animal on which the Prophet (SAW) rode on the night of Mairaaj was male or female. When the condition of a nation is such then Allah deals with them severely. Thus after a brief resistance Baghdad fell to Halaku Khan. The caliph and the city's nobility were killed in the first stage of the battle. For forty days the Tartars killed indiscriminately and filled the city streets with dead bodies. Baghdad's great library containing millions of priceless books was burnt to ashes. For weeks the waters of River Tigris ran black from the ink of the books and the blood of the massacred people. There was no sign of civilization left and the great Baghdad was ruined.

The whole Islamic world would have been washed away by the torrent but luckily the preaching of Islam got started amongst the Tartars. It was the power of preaching that within a century the entire Tartar nation embraced Islam. However, due to lack of proper Islamic training they continued to attack their Muslim brothers.

Jihad in the Way of Allah

Before we take a look at Imam Taymiyyah's participation in Jihad and his great achievements as a warrior it is necessary to briefly review the political conditions of those times.

Thirteen years before the birth of Imam Taymiyyah The Slave Kings started ruling Egypt and Syria. These were the Turkish slaves of Najmuddin Ayub (the last king from Salahuddin Ayubi's family) who were settled in Egypt on account of their bravery and loyalty. Izzuddin Aibek who usurped the throne was one of them. In 657 A.H., just three years before the birth of Ibne Taymiyyah, his slave Saifuddin gained control of the throne and defeated the Tartars. Ruknuddin Bebrus, another slave of Najmuddin, murdered Saifuddin and took over the reins of the government. This was the time of Ibne Taymiyyah's birth and childhood. With great pomp and grandeur he ruled for 18 years and defeated the Tartars many times. After that the caliphs changed frequently till Al Mansoor Saifuddin Qalawun ascended the throne. He crushed the Tartars in 678 A.H. and ruled with great splendor for twelve years. In 709 A.H. his son Al Malik al Nasir rose to power and ruled for 32 years. He was the contemporary of Ibne Taymiyyah. Since Egypt had control over Syria at that time, the Sultan's deputy or governor was appointed to look after its affairs.

In 699 A.H. Syria was terror stricken as rumors were rife that Tartars were about to attack. The Sultan of Egypt Malik Nasir himself took part in the encounter. The confrontation took place outside Damascus in which Nasir's army suffered defeat at the hands of Sultan Qazaan, the Tartar king. The news that the Egyptian army had been driven out caused panic. The rich and the elite of Egypt started leaving. The government officials left and chaos reached a point where jails were broken and there was looting and plundering everywhere. In the midst of all these troubles the citizens were further agonized by the thought of the

Tartars coming and creating more havoc in their lives.

This state of affairs made Ibne Taymiyyah very restless. Together with a few scholars and companions he set out to meet Qazaan to reach a peace agreement for the people of Damascus. Kamaluddin al Anja who was present on the occasion narrates:

"I was with Sheikh Ibne Taymiyyah on this occasion. He started reciting to the king the Quranic verses and the Ahadith enjoining fairness and just conduct. His voice gradually rising, he was drawing nearer to the king until his knees were about to touch those of Qaazan. He was listening attentively and did not seem to be displeased with this. He was in such awe of him that he asked the people around him, "Who is this scholar? I have never seen a man like him nor have I ever seen anyone as brave and courageous as him."

Ibne Taymiyyah said to Qazaan, **"**You claim to be Muslim and I have been told that you have with you imams, jurists and scholars. Yet you have deemed it proper to march upon Muslims**.** Your father and grandfather refrained from such acts. They kept their promises while you broke yours, and you oppressed the servants of Allah."

On this occasion food was served but Ibne Taymiyyah refused to join in with everyone. When insisted he said that it was not lawful to eat this food as it was prepared from the cattle of poor Muslims (without their permission) and cooked on wood from their trees. When Qazaan requested him to make dua (prayer) he did so in these words, "O Allah, if Qazaan is waging war in Your way and to exalt Your name then help him and if his intention is greed and expanding his empire then You take revenge from him". The strange part was that when the Sheikh was making dua Qazaan was saying Ameen. Our state was such that we were pulling our clothes closer to our bodies, expecting that the executioner will cut off Ibne Taymiyyah's head at the king's order and we would be splattered with his blood.

When the gathering was dismissed and we came out of the court room we told him that he almost had us killed and that we were not prepared to accompany him to the journey back to Damascus. He replied that he was also not prepared to go with us. He stated, "The one who fears anyone except Allah has a sickness in his heart". We left but Imam Sahib stayed on for a while. A number of prisoners were set free on his recommendation. On hearing this good news a lot of people gathered and with great honor he reached Damascus, accompanied by 300 riders. On the other hand we were still on our way when we got attacked by a gang which even stripped us of our clothes."

After some time Qazaan returned to his capital city of Tebrez where political situation had taken an adverse turn. He left his commander Ameer Bolaaee with an army of 60,000 to protect Syria. This army started plunder and pillage in the outskirts of Syria. Ibne Taymiyyah met Ameer Bolaaee and got some prisoners freed. After a few days news came that Sultan Nasir was setting out with the Egyptian army to free Syria. On hearing this news the Tartars fled immediately. At this time Damascus had no ruler so there was disorder and destruction everywhere. During these times Ibne Taymiyyah's routine was to patrol the city the whole night and persuade people to prepare for Jihad and exercise patience in those difficult times. When the deputy ruler Jamaluddin reached Damascus the first thing he did was to plan an invasion to eradicate the tribesmen who supported Qazaan. Ibne Taymiyyah took part in this expedition. Upon hearing the news of his arrival the tribal chiefs came to meet him. Impressed by his sermons they repented by the grace of Allah and gave assurances that they would return what they had looted from the people. Thus, for the time being Syria was saved from all internal and external dangers.

The following year the news of Tartars' decision to attack again caused chaos and confusion. When people decided to leave for

Egypt, Imam Sahib stressed upon them the excellence and obligation of Jihad and the disgrace and dishonor associated with leaving the battlefield. The news that the Egyptian ruler was coming himself with the army gave some comfort to the people. However, later the news came that he had gone back to Cairo. When Imam Sahib found out he himself went to Cairo to convince the Sultan to fight against Qazaan and his army. During the meeting the Sultan gave all kinds of excuses. Ibne Taymiyyah told him with distaste that even if he were not the ruler of Syria it was his obligation to help his fellow Muslim brothers. Being the ruler it was incumbent upon him to be their guardian and if he did not fulfill his duty he would be answerable to Allah. He said that if the Sultan was not concerned about Syria's safety then he should say it so that the people of Syria could nominate a ruler who would protect them in times of danger. After that he assured him that truth is always victorious and Allah will be their guardian and defender.

Impressed by his speech and his conviction the Sultan decided to fight Qazaan. The Egyptian armies set out and Ibne Taymiyyah gave the good news to the people of Damascus that the Sultan was coming with his army to defend Syria. At the same time news came that bad weather conditions had forced the Tartar army to return to Iraq and that the danger was no more.

After two years in 702 A.H. the Tartars set out to attack Syria once again. This caused a stir amongst the people but soon the Egyptian forces reached Damascus. Imam Ibne Taymiyyah would encourage the residents, commanders and soldiers and assure them they would be victorious. When people would ask him to at least say InshaAllah his reply would be that the people of Syria were oppressed and according to Allah's promise their victory was guaranteed.

On 2nd Ramadan 702 A.H. the Syrian and the Egyptian armies

stood in their ranks ready to face the Tartars. Imam Sahib gave the Fatwa (religious verdict) not to fast so that the soldiers do not feel weak during the battle. He himself broke his fast in front of the leaders and the commanders. The battle began and furious fighting ensued. Imam Sahib asked one of the commanders to show him the place where death was assured. He made him stand at a place where the enemy's arrows would rain down on him. The commander narrates that Imam Sahib raised his eyes toward the sky, supplicated for a while, then took his sword out of its sheath and pounced on the enemy like an eagle, soon disappearing from sight. It was only after Asr time when the Tartars were defeated that people saw the Imam come out of the battlefield safe and sound.

At night the Tartars sought refuge in the mountains but the Egyptian army had surrounded them from all sides. Some died when they were struck by arrows, some fell in the valleys whilst trying to flee and others drowned in the river Euphrates. Thus the Tartars suffered a historic and comprehensive defeat.

Religious Reformation - Opposition and its Causes

Before we take a look at Imam Ibne Taymiyyah's achievements as an Islamic revivalist and reformist we need to know the intellectual and spiritual mindset of the people of the time and why there was a need for this revivalist movement.

If we analyze the prevailing conditions in the 7th century Hijri we see that false and baseless beliefs had replaced the easy and simple teachings of Islam. The followers of these beliefs had formed different groups and were holding Islam and the Muslim Ummah hostage. The true picture of Islam had been distorted with new conspiracies surfacing time and again. In the following pages we will review how Ibne Taymiyyah single-handedly defended Islam on various fronts at the same time.

Shirk and Veneration of Tombs

Due to the interaction of Muslim society with large non-Muslim communities and nations, unislamic customs, practices and polytheistic doctrines had become common. People had elevated the dead saints to the status of god and the caretakers of these graves were given the position of prophets. People would pray facing the dead person in the grave and also beg forgiveness from them. They would consider visiting their sheikhs and imams more important than going for Hajj pilgrimage. Their audacity had reached a point where they would sacrifice their animals with the words "In the name of my lord (sheikh or imam)". As a consequence mosques had lost their importance and people had built fake tombs and graves everywhere. Imam Sahib used his speech and writing power to contradict these polytheistic beliefs. In his publications he made it clear that supplicating to anyone other than Allah is Haram (prohibited) and that there is no room for these practices in the Islamic Shariah. Ibne Taymiyyah explained that Tawhid is the central message of the prophets and the essence of Islam. His efforts were not wasted and the concept of Tawhid came alive again amongst the general public.

Philosophical Tradition

The second issue facing Ibne Taymiyyah was related to the followers of Ilm ul Kalam and philosophy. Although Ilm ul Kalam had been invented to combat philosophy, over a period of time the spirit of philosophy had seeped into Ilm ul Kalam itself. Excessive use of Greek terminology, stating one's views in a long and complicated manner, the insistence on using logic to prove the veracity of beliefs were the characteristics of Ilm ul Kalam. On top of everything, the greatness and sanctity of Aristotle had reached a point where his investigations were considered the final word in any issue. All this had transformed Ilm ul Kalam into a mixture of strange and absurd ideas. At that

time Nasiruddin Tusi had great influence and in his opinion Greek philosophy and logic had superiority over everything else. While the general public was in awe of Tusi, the scholars of Hadith and Fiqh were unable to defend their views as they were generally unfamiliar with the finer points of this science.

At this point Imam Ibne Taymiyyah stood up and did a fine job of intellectually critiquing Greek philosophy in order to objectively analyze its worth. Without any prejudice he acknowledged the useful contribution of the Greeks in the fields of Physics and Mathematics. However, as far as beliefs are concerned, he deemed the philosophers unsuccessful and ignorant. In his various books he pinpointed the specific mistakes committed by the philosophers. He would use logic to analyze and refute the arguments presented in complex philosophical debates. In this way he took the Islamic world out of the spell that had been cast on them in the last few centuries by the sciences of philosophy and logic. The original simple teachings of Islam once again assumed prominence. He convinced the people that the foundation of these sciences should be on reflection and reason and not blind conformation (Taqleed). Thus scholars of any time have a right to critically analyze these sciences and reject whatever is against reason. In this way at a time of intellectual stagnation Ibne Taymiyyah's criticism of Greek philosophy opened new doors of Ijtihad (reasoning based on religious principles).

Unislamic Tasawwuf (Sufism)

The Sufis were very popular amongst a vast majority of people at that time. The customs of different religions especially Hinduism were practiced in the name of Islam to the point that Islamic Shariah was not important to them anymore. The belief of one spirit moving into the body of another, the philosophy of Wahdat ul Wujood (unity of creation), the concept that Shariah laws can be suspended for Sufis are some of the examples.

Some branches of Sufism had stooped down to the lowest levels of deceit by using magical tricks to impress the public. Both the common man and the nobility held these Sufis in high esteem. The concept of Wahdat ul Wujood was exaggerated to the point that after Ibne Arabi, Talmisani went to the extent of saying that the entire Quran is full of Shirk because it differentiates between the Creator and the creation, while true Tawhid was found only in their writings.

The followers of the Jahmiyah sect started worshipping the creations of Allah to the point that the lowliest of creation was worshipped because it was considered god. On top of this the followers of this sect would commit the most shameful of sins and try to justify them on account of their beliefs. Some would be in love with girls and say that they could see the splendor of Allah in them. Some would embrace their loved one and call them god.

Imam Ibne Taymiyyah wrote a letter to Sheikh Nasr bin Sulaiman in this regard calling upon him to leave Ibne Arabi's unislamic beliefs especially Wahdat ul Wujood. Sheikh Nasr had an influence over the ruling class and even though they did not have an answer to his arguments, this whole group became Imam Sahib's arch enemy.

The Batiniyah Sect

Another sect that caused a lot of harm to the Muslims was the Batiniya sect. Their teachings were a mixture of Zoroastrian beliefs, Plutonic doctrines and evil political motives. Its followers always helped non-Muslim powers and external forces against the Muslims. During the crusaders' attacks on Syria and Palestine they sided with the crusaders. Even after the end of the crusades they were busy planning conspiracies and rebellions against the Muslims. When Syria was attacked they openly joined forces with the Tartars. When things became intolerable the ruler of the time decided to take action against

them and requested scholars to issue a fatwa regarding this matter. Not only did Imam Sahib declare that Jihad against this sect was obligatory but also wrote letters to the Muslims of other cities and invited them to participate in this Jihad. Finally a huge army of Mujahideen including Imam Sahib defeated the Batiniyah sect and dispersed their power.

Incursion of Christian Missionaries

Taking advantage of Muslims' political weakness in those times the Christians had started a movement to prove the superiority of their religion. They started compiling books trying to prove the excellence of Christianity and criticizing the Shariah brought by Prophet Muhammad (SAW). A book from the Christians of Cyprus reached Syria trying to prove that Christianity was the true religion and that Muhammad (SAW) was sent down only to the people of Arabia, not to the whole of mankind. When this book started gaining popularity in the religious and intellectual circles of Syria, Ibne Taymiyyah addressed this issue in his book 'Aljawab al Sahih Liman Badala Deenul Masih'. This book comprising of four volumes not only gave arguments to prove the prophethood of Muhammad (SAW) but also attacked the very foundations of Christianity. His analysis of the mistakes in their beliefs, history of Christianity and changes made in their scriptures was so exhaustive that it did not seem like the work of one man. Sheikh Abu Zahra wrote in his book that this book alone was enough to prove Ibne Taymiyyah's immortality as a scholar and intellectual.

Awakening of the Spirit of Ijtihad

The stagnation in the intellectual circles of Muslims was another thing that really distressed Imam Ibne Taymiyyah. Stepping out of one's school of thought was considered a crime and no scholar would dare to come to a conclusion on any new

issue facing the Muslims. Islamic jurisprudence had become stagnant, in stark contrast to the constant development and evolution of earlier centuries. In this situation Imam Sahib made possible what was considered unachievable. Even though he belonged to the Hanbali school of thought, he considered the opinions of all the four imams and of the modern and classic scholars. In a number of matters he came up with his own view.

When Imam Sahib openly criticized some of the beliefs of these schools of thought he earned immense displeasure from all sides. Even though opposition increased with each passing day the Imam never retreated from his stance. The fact was that Imam Sahib's intellectual level was much above the people of his time and when they came face to face with him the realization of their inferior intellect led to feelings of jealousy. He would prevail wherever he went. People used to flock to his sermons. He was so convinced of being on the right path that he would use very harsh words about the innovators in religion and other off-track people of the society. He waged Jihad with his pen and speech and when the need arose he would also try to remove evil from the root by using force as well. One day a pseudo saint wearing a long garment was brought to him. His nails and hair were long, his language foul and abusive and he was also an addict. Imam Sahib gave orders to get rid of his garment, cut his hair and nails and made him give up his addiction and use of foul language. The people of Damascus had sanctified a stone in the Jamiah Masjid and polytheistic rituals were performed around it. Imam Sahib gave orders for the stone to be broken down and thrown away.

Members of the Rifai sect tried to prove that they were the chosen ones by claiming that fire did not affect them. They challenged everyone that if they proved their claims right then they should be accepted as being on the right path. Imam Sahib declared that these antics were deceitful and whoever jumps in the fire their bodies should be cleaned with grass and vinegar

and then given a bath. And if someone continues with these antics he should be declared as Dajjal. On hearing this, a Rifai Sufi admitted that their antics did not work against Shariah but were popular among the Tartars. All these things made Imam Sahib extremely popular amongst the common people but very unpopular amongst some sections of the society. In the future he would face many trials and unfortunate events because of his beliefs.

Ibne Taymiyyah's Steadfastness in the Face of Trials and Tribulations

In 690 A.H. whilst giving a speech on the attributes of Allah, Imam Taymiyyah severely criticized the Ashaira school of thought which resulted in an open confrontation with the Shafaee scholars. This was the first time he was openly criticized. Since Imam Sahib enjoyed the support of the chief justice the Shafaee scholars had to silence.

In 698 A.H. Ibne Taymiyyah wrote the book 'Al Aqeedat ul Hamviyah' in answer to a question regarding divine names and attributes. In the book he supported the stance of the early period scholars and severely criticized the later era Ashaira. This created quite a stir and Imam Sahib was asked to justify the objections he had raised. His well researched response silenced his critics.

In the mean time Sheikh Nasr, whom he had earlier written a letter asking him to leave the path of Ibne Arabi, became his arch enemy. The deputy of the Sultan was a follower of Sheikh Nasr and the latter convinced him that the Imam's influence could be a threat to the Sultan in Syria. The deputy was asked by Sultan Nasir to make sure there was nothing wrong with the Imam's beliefs. In connection with this three gatherings were convened in which scholars scrutinized his beliefs. However, they could not find anything against the Sunnah of the Prophet

(SAW). After reading the report of these proceedings Sultan Nasir expressed his satisfaction.

His opponents could not accept this defeat and convinced Sultan Nasir that since his deputy was himself a follower of the Imam, the probe conducted by him was not impartial. Thus an order was issued to Imam Sahib to present himself in front of the Sultan in Egypt. The day he was leaving Damascus the whole city came out on the streets to bid him farewell. People were crying because they feared that a huge conspiracy was being planned against him.

When he reached Egypt a case was filed against him by the state and he was recommended a severe punishment. When he saw the prejudiced attitude of the chief justice he refused to speak for himself. The chief justice ordered Imam Sahib and his brothers to jail. His sermons in jail changed the lives of many people.

During his absence his followers were trying very hard to arrange a dialogue between Imam Sahib and his opponents. Finally they were successful in achieving this. After the first day of discussion his opponents did not have the courage to insist that he should be sent back to jail. Finally after eighteen months in captivity he was set free.

On the insistence of the people of Cairo, Imam Sahib stayed there for some time and started giving sermons at Jamia Hakimee. Only five months had passed since his release from jail when in a Friday sermon he criticized the beliefs of the Sufis. They could not tolerate this criticism and complained to the Sultan as well as filed a case against him in court. Imam Sahib gave such a powerful speech in his defense that the complainants were silenced and the court could not reach a verdict. Eventually on the insistence of his opponents Imam Sahib was given three choices by the ruler: to go to Damascus, to reside in Alexandria subject to certain conditions or choose a

life in captivity.

Imam Sahib took the advice of his followers and decided to go back to Damascus. He was still on the way when an order was issued for his imprisonment. The deputy ruler (who was his opponent) realized that once Ibne Taymiyyah reached Damascus he would again start his work with full freedom creating trouble for him. Hence without giving any reason he was imprisoned for the second time. Most of the Imam's time in prison was spent in the remembrance of Allah and the recitation of the Quran. Whatever time was left he would spend it in writing and preaching to his fellow prisoners. After some time his brother was also arrested.

In 708 A.H. the deputy ruler Ameer Birbas ousted Sultan Nasir. He knew that the Sultan had a soft spot for Imam Sahib. Birbas feared that the Imam's influence might create problems for him so he sent him to Alexandria which was a stronghold of the Sufis. Imam Sahib's critics were hoping that a prejudiced and intolerant Sufi would kill the Imam and so they would get rid of him forever.

The next year Sultan Nasir succeeded in rising to power again. Ameer Birbas was arrested and killed. Ibne Taymiyyah was released and he was given a warm welcome on his arrival in the Sultan's court. On the insistence of the Sultan and the people Imam Sahib stayed in Cairo for some time. After paying a visit to Bait ul Maqdas he returned to Damascus where he busied himself in preaching and literary work. Once again differences with the Sufis, religious innovators (Bidaati) and scholars of various schools of thought rose to the surface. His Fatawa (religious verdicts) and publications were not well received as they were against the views of the scholars close to the ruler. The issue regarding undertaking to divorce became serious. Ibne Taymiyyah's viewpoint was different from other scholars. Similarly, there were some other issues where the Imam came

in direct conflict with the scholars living under the umbrella of the government. The chief justice forbade him to issue any Fatwa regarding this matter. Imam Sahib had a strong conviction on this matter and thought it was improper for him to desist simply for the fear of the government. As a result on 22 Rajab 720 A.H. he was imprisoned again. After five months when the anger of the scholars had cooled down he was released.

Imam Sahib spent the next five years preaching and teaching with full concentration as he had no restrictions on him. He wrote some new books and reviewed some of his earlier works.

Since the scholars of that time had personal grudges against the Imam they started conspiring against him once again. The Fatwa that he had given 17 years ago regarding the visitation of graves became a topic of discussion again. According to his Fatwa it was unlawful in Shariah to undertake a journey merely to visit a grave. Ibne Taymiyyah had explained that instead of intending to visit the grave of the Holy Prophet (SAW) one's intention should be to offer prayers at the Mosque of the Prophet. Also, at the time of visiting the Prophet's grave, one should recite the Salaam in the same manner as was done by the companions of the Prophet and the people immediately following them (Ta'abaeen).

His opponents raised many objections and finally the government issued orders for his arrest. On receiving the news he said "I was expecting it. There is good hidden in this". The news of his arrest deeply saddened his followers who wrote numerous letters to the Sultan requesting a reversal of this decision.

His favorite pastime in jail was recitation of the Holy Quran. He also spent his time in answering questions related to Fiqh. His work would be highly awaited outside the jail. In one of his works he contradicted Qazi Abdullah bin al Akhnaee and wrote

that he had inadequate knowledge. This resulted in a complaint against him. The government confiscated his writing materials and paper. This was quite tough for the Imam but he demonstrated patience and started writing with charcoal on loose sheets of paper. While in prison he completed 80 recitals of the Quran.

Death

Imam Ibne Taymiyyah's health had started deteriorating while in jail. After a brief illness of 22 days he died on 22 Ziqaad 728 A.H. at the age of 67 years. The news of his death stunned the entire city. Thousands of people attended his funeral. When his body was brought to Jamia Umvi every street, market and ground was packed with people. All the shops were closed and people did not care whether they had their meals or not. After the funeral prayer everyone wanted to shoulder the coffin and because of the large crowd it was passing over peoples' heads. Handkerchiefs, turbans and shoes were strewn everywhere but nobody cared. The funeral procession had started out in the morning but it was Asr time when the Imam was finally laid to rest. His funeral prayer in absence was performed throughout the Islamic world. In a remote city of China his funeral prayer was announced in these words, "The funeral prayer of the conveyer of the Quranic message Shaikh Ibne Taymiyyah will now be offered."

Imam's Personality and Praiseworthy Attributes

The events that we have narrated in the preceding pages give an idea of Imam's intellectual level and his sense of honor for his religion. Even his contemporaries who were also his opponents acknowledged his intellectual brilliance. His critic Kamaluddin az Zalmakani says "I have never seen a more complete individual than him. Allah had made the knowledge of all the sciences as easy for him as he had softened iron for Prophet

Dawood. Whatever science he would be questioned about he would answer in a manner that his audience would think that he had knowledge of this science only and that no one else had mastered this knowledge like him."

The Imam was as great a devotee of Allah as he was a scholar. After performing his Fajr prayer he would sit in the same place till the sun had completely risen. During this time he would busy himself in the remembrance of Allah and seeking His forgiveness. If someone would ask him about this he would say, "This is my breakfast and if I miss my breakfast then my energy starts running out." After recitation of the Quran he would answer questions on Islamic jurisprudence. Then he would instruct pupils of Dar ul Hadith Sakariya and Dar ul Hadith Hanbaliya till Zuhr time. After Asr he would have a general gathering for everyone where all kinds of issues were discussed. After Maghrib prayer he would again teach his students and after Isha prayer he would be busy in compilation and composition of his work till late in the night.

During the nights he would separate himself from everybody (he never married) and busy himself with the recitation of the Quran. Whilst reciting the Quran tears would continuously flow down his face. He would keep himself occupied with the remembrance of Allah and Nawafil (optional prayers) till late. When he would begin the prayer his limbs would tremble and he would start shaking left and right.

Ibne Taymiyyah was blessed with such a heart that he had no interest in worldly wealth and power. After being influenced by some rumors the Sultan once asked him, "I hope you are not dreaming of taking over my empire." The Imam replied, "I would do that!!! I swear upon Allah that the Tartars kingdom and your kingdom combined are not worth anything in my eyes."

During his entire life his opponents continued to try to bother

him but he was always patient with them and this resolution increased with time. He used to say, “What can my enemies possibly do to me? My paradise is in my heart and my garden is in my chest, inseparable from me. For me prison is a place of solitude; execution is my opportunity for martyrdom; and exile from my town is but a chance to travel.”

Ibne Taymiyyah showed great magnanimity in forgiving his blood thirsty enemies. When Sultan Nasir rose to power again he decided to kill all the people that had caused the Imam pain and suffering. When the Imam found out he stated emphatically that he would not take revenge from anyone and on his insistence the Sultan relented.

It is impossible to cover all the matchless attributes and achievements of Imam Ibne Taymiyyah in this short essay. We will end with Hafiz Zahabi’s words that have become our own opinion after reading about the Imam’s life. When Hafiz Zahabi was exhausted from writing the Imam’s praises in his book, he stated, “It is not apt for a person like me to describe someone of his stature. I swear that if I stand between Rukn-e-Yamani and Maqaam-e-Ibrahim facing the Ka’aba and swear that my eyes have never seen anyone like him nor has he himself ever met his match then I would be speaking the truth and would not have to atone for my oath”.

Compilations

Maulana Attaullah Hanif has named 582 of Imam Taymiyyah’s literary works and compilations. They are categorized as follows: 102 of Tafseer, 41 of Hadith, 138 of Fiqh and Fatawa, 28 on the principles of Fiqh, 126 on beliefs and Ilm ul Kalam and 78 on ethics and Tasawwuf (Sufism).

An innumerable number of people benefitted from Imam Ibne Taymiyyah. His renowned students included scholars like Ibne Qayyim, Hafiz Ibne Kathir, Hafiz Ibne Abdul Hadi and Hafiz

Zahabi.

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Reference books

- *Tareekh-e-Dawat o Azeemat* by Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi
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- *Imam Ibne Taymiyyah* by Ghulam Jilani Barq
- *Suqoot-e-Baghdad Say Suqoot-e-Dhaka Tak* by Mian Muhammad Afzal

About the Author

Naima Sohaib, 40, is the author of "Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shaksiat", a 500-page book in Urdu about twenty most prominent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author.

Naima has a Masters in Islamic Studies from University of Karachi and did her B.Sc. in Mathematics from Lahore College for Women. She has also authored several storybooks for children. She lives in Karachi with her husband and four daughters.

About the Translator

Asma Farooq has been engaged in da'wah work for several years. She conducts a weekly program for children at an Islamic Center in Hong Kong. Her interest in great personalities of Muslim history led her to the present translation work.

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SULTAN MUHAMMAD FATEH

Naima Sohaib

Muslim Heroes series No. 12

Translated by Asma Farooq

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Translated from the Urdu book “Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shakhsiat” by Naima Sohaib

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

This booklet is twelfth in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by my dear friend Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. It tells us about these unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam. I hope that Muslims today will find their stories a source of inspiration.

This booklet is about Sultan Mohammad Fateh, a remarkable man who proved that with perseverance one can overcome any challenge and realize one's dreams. His greatest accomplishment was to be the leader of the army that was praised by the blessed Prophet (SAW) in a hadith that foretold the conquest of Constantinople.

Sultan Mohammad Fateh was a focused, just, brave and kind hearted man. His tolerance and respect for other faiths was exemplary. In these times of religious intolerance we should all take lessons from his reign in which every citizen regardless of his faith enjoyed complete peace and security.

Sultan Fateh is remembered not only for his conquests but also for his endeavors in the fields of education and public service. He had great love for literature and poetry and held scholars and learned men in high esteem. His dynamic personality makes him one of the great heroes of Muslim history.

May Allah reward Naima Sohaib for her encouragement, Sohaib Umar for patiently editing this piece of work and Farooq Saeed, my husband, for his constant support.

Asma Farooq

Sultan Muhammad Fateh

The Great Ottoman Caliph whose miraculous conquest of Constantinople (Istanbul) made history in world naval warfare

Introduction

Sultan's name was Mohammad Sani but in history he is remembered as Sultan Mohammad Fateh. His lineage is as follows:

Sultan Mohammad Sani bin Sultan Murad (the second) bin Sultan Mohammad (the first) bin Sultan Bayezid Yaldram bin Murad (the first) bin Sultan Urr Khan Ghazi bin Osman Khan (founder of the Ottoman dynasty).

Mohammad Fateh was the 7th sovereign of the Ottoman Empire.

Birth

Sultan Mohammad Sani was born on 20 April 1424, 26 Rajab 831 A.H.

Childhood, Education and Upbringing

Mohammad's father Sultan Murad was a just, determined, kind and generous Muslim ruler who strictly adhered to the Shariah. His people were happy with him as his reign was one of peace and prosperity. Sultan Murad was renowned for his welfare work.

From the beginning Sultan Murad made sure that his son received the best education and upbringing. He paid handsome salaries to the best teachers and scholars of the time to teach his son all the prevalent sciences. Mohammad Sani was not only

intelligent, he also had a great zeal for learning. His teachers acknowledged his intelligence and extraordinary abilities. At a young age he became proficient in Arabic, Persian, Latin, Hebrew and Greek (apart from his native language Turkish). Besides religion he had a special interest in Greek philosophy, history and eastern culture and civilization. He used to read with great interest about kings especially conquerors like Alexander the Great and was an ardent admirer of his heroic adventures.

He had a natural inclination towards poetry and whilst still a young prince had become a great connoisseur of poetry under the guidance of his teachers. He had memorized the best poetry written by Turkish, Arab and Persian poets. Mohammad was quick to excel in the art of writing and speaking. Apart from this he would also take interest in learning the skills of warfare.

The Ottoman sovereigns were not inclined towards a life of luxury; infact apart from being rulers of the state they were also army generals. Mohammad had inherited his courage and valor from his ancestors. His own father Sultan Murad was a brave warrior. Mohammad learnt from his father the tactics of warfare planning and strategy as well as how to manage the government and the politics.

During his reign, Sultan Murad was constantly at war with his enemies. The reason behind this was not his greed to expand his territory but his enemies forced him every time to wage war against them. As soon as his enemy would concede defeat he would put down his weapons and would strictly abide by all peace treaties. Tired after 22 years of conflict, he entered into a peace agreement for ten years with the king of Hungary. On the way back he received the news of the death of Alauddin, his oldest and extremely capable son. This news shook him up so much that he decided to permanently separate himself from the affairs of the state. Sultan made his other son Mohammad the king, who was at the time only fourteen years old, and left for

Asia Minor where he devoted himself to the remembrance of Allah.

As soon as the news spread that the Sultan's young and inexperienced son had ascended the throne, the Christians launched an attack disregarding the peace treaty. As a result of this there was great bloodshed in the coastal areas of the Black Sea. When Sultan Murad was given this news he was moved to tears. He put his prayer mat on his horse, gathered an army of forty thousand men and proceeded to Varna where he inflicted a crushing defeat upon the crusaders. Once again Murad handed over the throne to his son and went back to Magnesia. A few years later he had to again come back to power to curb rebellion in the army. For the next six years he ruled with great pomp and splendor. Around this time Mohammad got married to the daughter of a convert. For the next six years, in his capacity as heir to the throne, he gained experience by working in different departments of the state. And finally, after being crowned twice before, he returned to the throne permanently at the age of 21 years.

Ascension to the Throne

Sultan Murad Sani passed away on 3rd February 1453 (856 A.H.). On hearing the news of his death, Mohammad Sani, without any hue and cry, arrived in Galli Poli from Magnesia where he was residing at that time. For fear of rebellion he kept the news of his father's death a secret. During his father's life, whenever he took control of the affairs of the government, Prime Minister Khalil Pasha and his allies always complained of his attitude. They thought that he did not take into consideration anyone's suggestion in front of his own opinion. Even though their criticism gave him a chance to rectify his mistakes, he knew that if he did not handle things wisely his succession could be in danger. He waited for a suitable time to announce his father's death and immediately thereafter his

coronation ceremony took place. At the age of 21 he had already gained practical experience to bear this heavy responsibility. Showing great prudence and insight he did not remove any of the senior officials from their existing positions. He also appointed new people on the basis of their ability and aptitude.

In the last six years not only had Sultan Mohammad learnt how to govern the state but had also become an experienced general. However, the king of Constantine still considered him to be inexperienced. He started to create trouble at the borders. He sent an envoy to Sultan's court who delivered this message in a rude manner: "If the Sultan does not increase the stipend of this Ottoman prince (who was in his custody) we will ourselves put him on the throne of the Ottoman Empire."

When Sultan got this message in Asia Minor he was busy punishing a few rebellious members of the elite ruling class. Patiently he heard this threatening message and ignored it for the time being. Everyone knew that war was now imminent.

Ottoman Turks and Constantinople

Before we give an account of Sultan Mohammad Fateh's greatest achievement, it is necessary to understand the conditions prevailing at that time.

In the 11th century Muslims gained real strength in Asia Minor as a result of the Seljuk conquests. However, passing time saw the decline of the Seljuk Empire and mutual disputes deprived it of its original glory.

In the midst of the 13th century a few Turk families from the 'Oguz' tribe fled from Khorasan fearing attacks by Ganges Khan. Unable to find shelter for some time, they finally started their journey towards Asia Minor to seek refuge with Seljuk Emperor Alauddin. When they reached Angora they saw a huge

cloud of dust that had covered the horizon. When Artughral, their tribal leader, climbed the top of a mountain he saw two armies engaged in heavy fighting. One army was much less in number than the other and it seemed that soon it would flee after being overcome by the bigger army. Since it was usual among the Turks to help the weaker party, Artughral and his men joined the smaller army and helped them win the battle. After the battle ended Artughral realized that his timely assistance had actually helped Alauddin Seljuk avert defeat at the hands of the Tartars.

The attacks by the Tartars had caused destruction in the entire Islamic world and now they were at war with Sultan Seljuk in Asia Minor. To show his gratitude Sultan Alauddin Seljuk gave Artughral a flourishing and fertile piece of land, next to the borders of the Greek empire. After some time Artughral, serving as the deputy of the Sultan, defeated the Greeks and the Mongols. Pleased, the Sultan rewarded him with more land and named his state 'Sultanooni'. Artughral was also nominated as the commander of a section of the Sultan's army. He would choose the finest and the bravest young men from his state for his army. After seeing their strength and courage on the Greek borders, the Christians were terrified of this small but courageous army. After Artughral passed away the Sultan handed over his territory to his competent son, Osman, who would later become the founder and the first sovereign of the Ottoman Empire.

Osman always stayed loyal to the Seljuk rulers even though their government became weak with time and there was much dissension among the deputies.

Establishment of the Ottoman Empire

After the death of the last Seljuk emperor many chieftains founded small states of their own. Osman also declared his independence and thus laid the foundation of a vast empire

which would be included amongst the great powers of the world within 150 years. In less than 300 years the Ottoman Empire became the greatest empire of the world in its strength and expanse. This empire lasted for around 625 years and came to an end when in 1924 Ghazi Mustafa Kamal Pasha Ataturk announced the creation of a democratic state in Turkey.

After the end of the Seljuk Empire ten small states had been created. Within a short span of time Osman had absorbed all the neighboring areas into his empire. The span of his conquests had brought him so close to Constantinople that Kaiser had to request the Tartars for help. Osman's son Urr Khan exhausted the Tartars by inflicting a series of defeats upon them.

Sultan Osman was on his death bed when Barosa, a key city, was conquered. The advice that he gave his son Urr Khan before dying gives us an insight into his character, approach and strategy. He said:

"Do not be cruel or tyrannical. Be fair and just to people so that they are happy and the country prospers. Expand your state through victories so that Allah's message spreads in every direction. Always keep the scholarly and learned men close to yourself and listen to their advice. Make the adherence to Shariah and its implementation your focus. Always strive to inculcate good character in your people and give it preference over all matters. In this way mankind will develop and prosper. The only aim of my life was to spread Islam and to put ethics into practice. You should also make this the purpose of your life."

After Osman Khan's death his son Urr Khan took control of the state and focused his attention on expanding the empire. In Europe he clashed with the Greeks but he managed to defeat them. He also gained control of Adrianople and later it was made the capital.

The Ottoman emperors that succeeded him managed to even conquer Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania. The Christians of Europe formed an alliance against the fourth Ottoman caliph Bayazid the first. In 1396 the Christian allies suffered a crushing defeat in the battle of Nicopolis at the hands of the Ottoman army. Now Sultan Bayazid became even more confident and started a siege of Constantinople. This worried the Europeans immensely and they decided to call Timur from Asia to confront Bayazid. Timur who was himself a great conqueror agreed to fight against another Muslim ruler only to prove his supremacy over him. Bayazid was forced to lift the siege and subsequently the most deplorable battle in the history of Islam took place at Angora. Bayazid's army of 120,000 was up against Timur's force of 500,000. Bayazid was defeated and captured in this battle. According to some reports, Timur kept him in a cage where he died after eight months.

The Battle of Angora apparently caused the decline of the Ottoman Empire. It started losing territories one after the other and was soon dispersed like scattered beads. The Greeks gained courage by this and started interfering at the borders. When Timur left to invade China, Bayazid's sons started fighting for the throne and eventually Sultan Mohammad (the first) emerged victorious. Not only did he re-establish the Ottoman Empire but also organized his armies to fight against the Europeans.

After Sultan Mohammad (the first) died his son Sultan Murad Sani ascended the throne. Sultan Mohammad Fateh was his son. During Sultan Murad Sani's reign the Ottomans had absolute control over the Balkans. They also conquered Venice, Greece, Hungary and Albania. After the historical victories at Kosovo and Varna, Sultan Mohammad Fateh's father had control in Europe extending to River Danube except for Constantinople. He left the world with the wish to conquer Constantinople in his heart.

Initial Efforts to Conquer Constantinople

Before we give an account of how Constantinople was conquered it is necessary to mention the importance of this city and the previous efforts that had been made by the Muslims to conquer it.

Since the time of Hazrat Ameer Muawiyah the Muslims wanted to capture this city, as the Prophet (SAW) had predicted the conquest of the city at the hands of Muslims. The Prophet (SAW) had also given glad tidings of forgiveness to the first army that attacked Constantinople. He said: "The first army amongst my followers who will invade Caesar's city will be forgiven their sins." [Sahih Bukhari]

Allah had also given the Prophet (SAW) knowledge of the fact that the first army would not succeed. In another hadith he gave glad tidings of victory and said: "Verily you shall conquer Constantinople. This victorious army would be good and so would be its leader." [Al Musnad Ahmad, Hakim, Ibne Shaiba]

This is the reason why the Muslims wanted to conquer this city since the time of the righteous caliphs.

In 48 A.H. Amir Muawiyah sent the first Muslim army through land and sea routes to Constantinople. Several prominent companions of the Prophet (SAW) namely Hazrat Abu Ayub Ansari, Ubadah bin Samit, Abu Darda, Abdullah bin Umar, Abdullah bin Zubair and Abdullah bin Abbas were part of this expedition. However, the wall of the city was very strong and the Muslims were also unable to tolerate the harsh winter. Abu Ayub Ansari died during the siege and asked to be buried under the city wall inside the enemy territory. A few other Muslims were also martyred and the city could not be conquered.

Two attempts were made during the rule of Banu Umayyah while during the rule of Banu Abbas, caliph Haroon Rashid

himself led an army of 100,000 to Constantinople. However, the queen made peace with him by agreeing to pay a yearly tax. When the Ottoman Empire was founded in Asia Minor, it faced constant hostility from the European kings. Apart from Constantinople, the whole of the Balkans was conquered by the Ottomans. Bayazid Yuldrum was the first Ottoman emperor that laid siege to Constantinople. Later, Mohammad's father Sultan Murad made an attempt to conquer the city but he also failed and left the world with this unfulfilled wish in his heart.

The Significance of Constantinople

The importance that this city had from the start for the Ottoman Empire can be understood by a dream that is mentioned in the books of history. Once when Osman, the founder of the Ottoman Empire, was staying at the house of his spiritual leader 'Addahbali' he saw a dream. Osman saw a crescent rise from the bosom of Adahbali and after becoming a full moon sank into his own bosom. After that a great tree sprang from his side and started growing bigger till it spread over land and sea. From the roots of this tree gushed the four great rivers of the world: Tigris, the Euphrates, Danube and Nile. The branches of this great tree were supported by the four great mountains of the world: Caucasus, Taurus, Balkan and Atlas. Then a strong wind blew and the leaves of the tree which were sword shaped started pointing towards a great city. This city which was at the junction of two seas and two continents seemed like a ring set with two sapphires and two emeralds. Osman was about to wear this ring when he woke up. Later he narrated this dream to his mentor Addahbali who gave him the good news that one day he would be the founder of a great empire, that Muslims would benefit from his children and that he (Addahbali) would give his daughter in marriage to him.

This dream did come true! The city that Osman saw in his dream was actually Constantinople (Istanbul) on which the

people of east and west had their eyes for the last one thousand years. Its geographical location, moderate climate, safe ports, spacious markets, clean roads, high rise buildings, magnificent churches, strong forts and its commercial and cultural importance had made it prominent in the world. Constantinople was instrumental in introducing the Roman law and the Greek philosophy to the world. Its libraries and educational institutions were famous around the world and its ports were full of well stocked ships from far and near. Thousands of people from Russia, Hungary, Germany, Italy, Serbia, Albania, Hispania and various Asian countries resided in Constantinople making it an international city. This is why the outside world in every era had its eyes on Constantinople and the city had to put up with incessant attacks of the enemy.

Being in a constant state of war had damaged its economy and military power. The king of Constantinople always had the role of a dictator who in addition to possessing political authority also served as the spiritual leader of the people. The fourteenth century did not prove too good for the Christian leadership of Constantinople. Christian states belonging to the Roman Catholic sect seized many of the territories from the Greeks. Constantine, the king of Constantinople, tried his best to form an alliance of the Christian states in order to get rid of Turkey from Europe but his efforts proved futile. By the end of his rule his state was limited to a few miles and Constantinople was a capital which was a country in itself. In addition the army, the tribal leaders, government officials and even the clergy were all conniving by nature.

Despite these conditions, Constantine never missed any chance to inflict harm upon the Turks. Breaking treaties with the Muslims seemed to be part of their tradition. Even though he had made peace with Sultan Mohammad’s father, Constantine started threatening him soon after his father’s death.

Sultan Mohammad Advances Forward

At this point the first thing that Sultan Mohammad did was to tighten his control over all internal matters of the Empire. After that he decided that the time to conquer Constantinople had come as it was hanging like a sword over the Ottoman Empire. Besides, the prophet's prediction was also something that he had in his mind.

This thought troubled him so much that one night he couldn't sleep at all. Restless, he sent for his minister Khalil Pasha, who was perplexed at being beckoned at such an odd time. On his arrival the Sultan said: "Can you see what grief and sorrow has done to me? I turn sides the whole night but still can't get any sleep. I just ask for one thing from you, that you give me Constantinople." Khalil Pasha comforted him, knowing that the Sultan was sincere in his desire and that true passion could make the impossible into possible.

As a first step, the Sultan reached truce with a few Christian states and also started the construction of a fortress 'Anatolia Hisar' just five miles away from Constantinople. The purpose of building this fortress was to keep an eye on the movements of the Christian navy and also to block all routes of aid and assistance. As the walls of the fortress became higher, Sultan started storing modern weapons and ammunition. Huge cannons were also built to protect the fortress. Sultan started receiving threats from the Christians and the situation became tense to the point that an army came and attacked the fortress. However, the army deputed at the fortress defeated them and the Christian forces retreated leaving behind their dead.

When Constantine saw the turn of events he knew that the Sultan was intent on attacking the city. He therefore approached the Christian states and asked them for help in the name of religion. It is important to make clear that at this point in time the Christian world was divided into two sects that were old

adversaries:

1. Catholics who followed the Roman Pope.
2. People of Constantinople who were influenced by the Greek Church.

The Pope did not agree to offer any help; instead he insisted on his old demands and said that this matter cannot proceed any further till the Greek Church unites with the Catholic Church. Constantine realized that he had no choice but to agree to this demand. Thus in the presence of 300 priests, Saint Aya Sophia and the Roman Church became an alliance. As a result of this agreement a vast majority of the people of Constantinople grew angry with their king. They were convinced that this alliance would bring upon them the wrath of God. Even Constantine's deputy and the commander in chief of his army were so displeased that they thought it would have been better to give up their land to the Turks than agree to the insulting demands of the Pope. After all these efforts that he made to save his land, all that Constantine got from the Christian states was a few hundred soldiers and some gifts of wine. The underlying reason behind this was both the fear of the Turks and religious/sectarian prejudice.

As part of preparations for war, the Caesar of Constantinople had started storing grains and food provisions. The city of Constantinople was triangular in shape with two of its sides surrounded by water. One side was called the Golden Horn and the other strait of Marmara (Propontis). Thus it could be attacked by land from only one side. Three great walls which were wide and fortified with towers were built to protect the city from attacks. These walls were 60 feet apart and there was a very wide and hundreds of feet deep trench between them. In the 5th century B.C. these walls had been constructed by the then emperor and they had safeguarded the city during 21 sieges.

Thick steel chains had been tied in the sea around the port to stop any ship from entering the port. When the people of the city wanted to allow any ship into the port they would loosen the chain into the deep sea.

Sultan had complete knowledge of all the preparations and the safety measures that were being taken to protect the city. He knew that in order to conquer this city he would have to successfully bomb these walls. Therefore, instead of depending on ordinary cannons he asked a Christian engineer to design a much bigger cannon that could shoot two and a half feet balls. At the same time he also issued orders to build small and easy to move cannons. He was also preparing a fleet of 180 warships to besiege the city by sea. Sultan also feared that Constantine's two brothers based in Greece might send him some kind of assistance. He sent soldiers to take control of a strategic area, thereby cutting all sea contact between Greece and Constantinople.

The Decisive Battle

After finishing all the preparations Sultan Mohammad Fateh finally reached Constantinople on 16 April 1453. The morale of the army was very high and everyone was anxious to conquer the city. The army was accompanied by scholars who were keeping the soldiers motivated. Before hoisting the flag on his headquarters Sultan and his fighters offered prayers and asked Allah for help and victory.

Before the commencement of the battle, Sultan had sent a message to Constantine asking him to handover the city so they could avoid any kind of bloodshed. Constantine rejected this offer. The truth is that Sultan's opponent was also a courageous and brave man. Before the start of the siege he was advised to leave the city with his family. Enraged at the suggestion, he said that his life and death was for Constantinople and that he would never leave his people in their time of need.

The siege started immediately after Constantine refused to hand over the city peacefully. Constantinople was surrounded from both land and sea. Since the wall near the gate of Saint Romanus was relatively weak both the armies were especially focused on this area – Turks in attacking the wall and the Christians trying to defend it. There was fierce fighting between the Sultan's elite force 'Yani Chari'(also called Janissary) and the Christians. Sultan's heavy cannons would damage the city walls but the Greeks would repair them right away. At one point Sultan took his army to the edge of the trench and found ways to cross the trench to reach the city wall. The Christians drove them back by lighting oil and throwing it at them. Subsequently, Sultan came up with a new strategy. He built tall wooden towers affixed with wheels and at the top of these towers long ladders were tied. These towers were then rolled to the edge of the trench and one end of the ladder was lowered to the other end to make a bridge. When the Ottoman army tried to climb up to reach the city wall, the besieged Christians threw balls of fire and torched the towers. Thus this strategy also failed.

On 18 April there was fierce battle between the Greeks and the Ottoman army. The Greek soldiers defended themselves valiantly and the Turks were forced to retreat. On the same day when the Turkish naval fleet moved forward to damage the massive Greek naval ships, it met with heavy bombardment and had to bear great losses. They were also unable to cut through the chains around the harbour. Two days later, when ships carrying aid arrived from Geneva the Turks surrounded them in the sea. However, suddenly the wind blew in such a manner that the Italian ships managed to make way between the Ottoman ships and entered Constantinople's harbour.

Miracle in the History of Naval Warfare

Despite repeated failure of his strategies, the Sultan became even more determined and increased his efforts to conquer

Constantinople. Now that his navy and army had failed despite their best efforts he would worry day and night as to what his next course of action should be. After a great deal of contemplation he came to the conclusion that if they attacked from the direction of the Golden Horn their chances of success would be high. The reason for this was that on this side of the port the city wall was not very high and neither was the trench very deep. However, the problem was that there was a strong chain and a fortified Greek naval fleet protecting the entrance of the Golden Horn. Sultan wanted that somehow his ships should enter Golden Horn without clashing with the Greek navy. For this a strange idea came in his mind; a part of his fleet should be transported by land to Golden Horn. The ten mile long strip of land between the strait of Bosphorous and Golden Horn had an uneven terrain with scattered clusters of small trees. Sultan wanted the ships to be transported through this strip to reach the harbor (see map on the next page).

His engineers were perplexed at this suggestion but he managed to convince them. They leveled the terrain and then cut trees from the forest and made planks from the trunks. After this thousands of animals were sacrificed and their fat was used to grease these planks. They were then laid out in a way that ships could be mounted on them and glided into the harbour.

The night of 22nd April was a hard one for the people of Constantinople. The Ottomans were bombarding them relentlessly with fireballs so that their attention would be focused on that side. On the other hand, Sultan's men were successful in transporting around seventy to eighty boats and small ships into Golden Horn overnight by gliding them through the planks.

When the people of Constantinople woke up in the morning they were terrified and shocked to see the Turkish fleet in the harbour. There was fear and confusion everywhere. They could

not comprehend how such a large number of ships could have come so close without moving the heavy chains and the strong fleet of warships. On hearing this news Constantine became weary with shock and grief. The unbelievable miracle of naval history had taken place. Nevertheless, he ordered his ships to launch an attack on the Turkish ships. The issue though was that the massive Greek ships could not even enter the shallow waters in which the small Turkish ships were anchored. Thus their strength became a weakness for them.

The Final Attack

After 51 days of siege, the Sultan decided to launch the final and decisive attack on Constantinople. Earlier he had already made an offer to save Constantine and his people. He had sent one of his chiefs, Isfandayar Oghli, with the message that if the city is handed over to him he would guarantee the safety of all the people and that Constantine would be given the freedom to go the Turk occupied peninsula of Morea and to rule over it according to his own will. They were also informed that if they reject this offer, there would be no guarantee for the safety of their lives and property.

The camps of the Ottoman army were lit up the whole night on 27th May. The soldiers were busy praying and great zeal and fervor could be seen everywhere. On the other hand the people of Constantinople were dejected after the arrival of the Ottoman ships in the harbour and news of the imminent attack had also reached them. They remained restless and uneasy that night.

Constantine went to the church at Saint Sophia with his men and women and asked God for forgiveness. Then he gave a passionate speech. His manner reflected that he was convinced of losing Constantinople. He wandered in the rooms of his magnificent palace where he and his predecessors had ruled for centuries with great pomp and glamour. Lamenting over his past, the last Caesar left to give orders to his army.

…and Constantinople is Conquered!

The Turks attacked before daybreak. Fierce fighting ensued on all sides especially near the door of Saint Romanus. The irregular army of the Turks initiated the attack in order to weaken the defense of the enemy, paving the way for the regular army to launch a formidable attack.

Sultan was on horseback with an iron mace in his hand. When fierce fighting continued till late afternoon, Sultan sent one of his men to his spiritual leader who had come with him for spiritual guidance and prayer. Sultan feared that if today Constantinople was not conquered the Turks would start considering it unconquerable. Hence he ordered his special force 'Yani Chari' to move forward and launch a powerful offensive. Agha Hassan, a strong and able bodied member of the Yani Chari together with three other men moved forward and tried to climb the city wall to hoist the Turkish flag. They were all martyred, one after the other, but they managed to make things easier for the other soldiers who swiftly climbed the city wall and hoisted the Sultan's flag. On the other hand the naval forces also succeeded in climbing a tower and raising Sultan's flag.

The news of the city's capture spread like wildfire amongst the Greeks and consequently their defense fell apart. Constantine and his faithful aides tried their best to unite their men and fight on the frontline but their efforts proved futile. Constantine died fighting valiantly. The next day his body was retrieved from a pile of dead bodies. The only reason he was identified was because his red shoes were quite distinct due to a golden eagle engraved on them. The death of the 45-year old emperor closed the chapter of the Constantinian Empire forever.

It was Zuhr time when Sultan Mohammad Sani, the conqueror of Constantine, accompanied by his generals, ministers and the army entered the city with great splendor. They came through

the gate of Saint Romanus and then marching through marketplaces reached Saint Sophia. When he reached the door he took off his shoes and rubbed dust on his forehead as a show of humility in front of his Creator. After that he entered the church and was awe struck by its beauty. The clergymen were standing at the sacrificial site to welcome him. Sultan kept the chief officer of the church on his duties. In fact, he gave him the additional responsibility to resolve the judicial matters concerning the Christian community. He was also authorized to give recommendations for the rights of the Christians and to give compensation in case any injustice was committed against them. After doing this, he ordered a man to call out the Azan (call to prayer). Thus for the first time instead of church bells the greatness of Allah's words echoed in the magnificent Ayah Sophia. The church was converted into a mosque and for hundreds of years it was counted among the most magnificent mosques of the Islamic world. After Ata Turk became the head of modern Turkey he converted the mosque into a museum in 1931 in his zeal to secularize the country and break away from its glorious Islamic past.

After leaving the church, Sultan took a walk around the city. He was saddened to see the palaces of great emperors. He read a piece of poetry which meant that even the palaces of great kings like Kisra and Afrasiab are deserted and are now home to cobwebs and owls.

The palaces of Caesar were laden with the best works of art, antiques and treasures from Asia and Europe, which were now in the possession of the Ottoman Turks.

Sultan Mohammad was 23 years old when he conquered Constantinople. In this regard he can be compared to Alexander the Great and Napoleon who also started their conquests at approximately the same age. After the victory, Sultan sent emissaries to different parts of the Islamic world to announce

this blessed news. It sent a wave of happiness throughout the Muslim world.

It is reported that right after the conquest there was some bloodshed and looting but after three days total peace and security were restored. At this point it is natural to wonder why the Sultan did not use his power to stop the bloodshed and looting by the troops. Like Salahuddin Ayyubi why he did not protect the lives and properties of the conquered people which is an important Islamic trait.

The basic reason seems to be the fact that Sultan had not been in power for long and did not have absolute control over all matters. Neither did he enjoy such confidence and loyalty that all his decisions would be accepted without any opposition. If in the beginning Constantine had handed over the city without resistance, then according to Sultan's offer every Christian's life and property would have been protected. In this case it would have been easy to restrain the troops as they would have captured Constantinople without any sacrifice. Now that they had put everything at stake for this victory, it was very difficult to control them especially when in recent times their experiences with the Christians had been continuously unpleasant. Also the Turks had not forgotten the atrocities committed against Muslims in Andalus (Spain). After all this, it was difficult to completely curb their emotions.

However, three days later total peace was restored in the city. The Christians soon realized that they were leading a more peaceful and prosperous life now than under their Christian rulers.

Sultan Mohammad Fateh's Other Conquests

The conquest of Constantinople was followed by a series of victories for the Sultan. He was engaged in war during most of his 30 year reign and there was hardly any expedition after

which he would not absorb a new region into his empire. Greece, Serbia, Bosnia, Albania, Otranto (a city near Italy), Crimea and Carmania were all conquered during his rule.

Death

Sultan was still busy in his conquests when he was overcome by death. He died in 886 A.H. at the age of 51 and was buried in the famous mosque that he had constructed in Constantinople. While the Islamic world mourned his death, Europe rejoiced at this news.

Sultan's Character

Apart from being a monarch Sultan Mohammad was also a great scholar. He had in depth knowledge of Quran and hadith as well as various other sciences. He had immense respect for scholars and his gatherings would be attended by learned men and experts of various fields. Sultan had keen interest in history and was an avid reader of the lives of great conquerors and emperors. His personal library contained thousands of rare and valuable books. When the city of Agwasa, a centre of learning, had to pay tax the Sultan demanded books in place of wealth and property.

He would go himself to attend the lectures of Maulana Alauddin Toosi. He had immense respect for his teacher Alkharani and would send a special ride for him. This is the same teacher who beat him with a stick when he was still a prince. In addition to the madrassahs that were already present in the towns and cities Sultan founded many colleges and even appointed the teachers himself. During his rule he opened thousands of schools that were attached to the mosques. There was not a single village which did not have an educational institute in it and the education of every child was the responsibility of the state. He founded numerous mosques and hospitals in the cities and dedicated large properties for their maintenance.

Sultan was a talented horseman, an expert in military warfare and a clever man who loved progress. He also had complete understanding of the affairs of the state. Although he had inherited bravery and valor from his ancestors, the secret of his success was that he would take advantage of new military inventions and was an expert in devising extraordinary military strategies.

Sultan had a very modest lifestyle and his eating habits were also very simple. Whatever time he had left after resolving the affairs of the state, he would spend it in reading or would sometimes go hunting. His life was far from luxurious and he disliked being lost in gatherings of music and fun. Solitude was very dear to him. He was a reserved man and always kept his distance even with his own Prime Minister. He would never disclose his secrets to anyone. Whenever he decided to attack even his commanders were unaware as to which direction the offensive would start from. Once when his forces were being gathered for an expedition, one of his chief officers asked him where they were headed. Sultan sternly replied “Even if a hair from my beard finds out my plans, I would break it and throw it in the fire”.

Sultan considered secrecy and swift action as keys to success in a battle and this was the reason for his stern attitude. This does not mean that Sultan was an arrogant man. Even in the midst of fierce fighting he would never miss a chance to console the ordinary soldiers of his army.

He was always relaxed in his dealings with his non-Muslim subjects. The orders that he issued after conquering Constantinople stated that the Greeks would enjoy full religious freedom and there was no difference in the treatment meted out to the Turks and the Greeks after the conquest. In those times religious persecution was at its peak because the Muslims and the Christians had been at war for a long time. In the prevailing

circumstances sometimes during war he would deal with his enemies severely instead of giving them concessions. However, we can say that overall he was kind and forgiving for both the Muslim and non-Muslim citizens of his empire.

Sultan disliked severity in the implementation of the Shariah. He had great love for the Quran. He regularly attended congregational prayers and never missed his fasts. He was a fair and just man by nature. In his kingdom the judiciary was totally independent. People could bring their appeals to the king but he could not influence the decision given by the court.

It was difficult for the European historians to completely acknowledge the praiseworthy attributes of the Sultan. The conquest of Constantinople had glorified Sultan's dynamic personality in the Muslim world but on the other hand had become a reason for hatred among the Christian historians. Even though the historians of every era recognized Sultan's qualities they never erred in making allegations against him. Some would call him cruel while others alleged that he did not honor agreements.

Instead of giving our own opinion in this matter we would refer to the hadith of the Prophet (SAW) in which he particularly praised the army and its leader that conquered Constantinople. After receiving praise from the blessed tongue of the Prophet (SAW) why would Sultan need any historian to reaffirm his greatness?

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ABDULLAH BIN MUBARAK

Naima Sohaib

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

When Sr. Naima Sohaib approached me regarding the translation of one personality from her book "Tareekh-e-Islam ki Qabil-e-Fakhr Shakhsiaat" I chose Abdullah bin Mubarak. This is because he dedicated his life to acquire and impart the knowledge of the truth, something the Muslim youth today seem to be lacking. The crisis we face today is partly the crisis of knowledge. Abu Hurairah (RA) reports that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said, "Allah makes the way to paradise easy for him who treads the path in search of knowledge." [Muslim]. There is an abundance of information available on every topic imaginable, but very few students work hard to delve deeper into the treasure of wisdom and knowledge left by classical Islamic scholars.

Abdullah bin Mubarak's transformation from a young adult indulged in music and entertainment to a serious student of religion has lessons for us. Who can be a better role model than a young man who strove his whole life to seek knowledge, acted on it himself and spread it to others? His timeless advice to students – to be sincere, pay attention to the teacher, ponder over and memorize the lessons and spread the learning – is as beneficial today as it was in his time.

I hope those who read this biography will realize that seeking true knowledge with the right intention is the starting point for success in this life and next. May Allah reward Naima for leading this project of building awareness of our true heroes and Sohaib Umar for editing this booklet.

Farah Salman

Abdullah bin Mubarak

A Great Scholar and an Exemplary Balanced Personality

Introduction

His name was Abdullah and his kuniyat was Abu Abdur Rahman. His genealogical chain is: Abdullah, son of Mubarak, son of Waazih-al-Hanzali.

Abdullah's father was a slave of a merchant in the city of Haran. This merchant was from Bani Hanzala, a tribe of Bani Tamim. That is why Mubarak's name carries Al-Hanzali.

Background

Abdullah's father Mubarak was a very pious and righteous man. During his servitude he was assigned to be the caretaker of his master's orchard. He would fulfill his duty with utmost honesty and diligence. One day his master visited the orchard and desired a sweet pomegranate. Mubarak brought a pomegranate that he thought would be sweet. When the master opened the fruit and ate a few seeds, he found it to be sour. He angrily said, "You have been working here for so many years and you don't know which tree has the sweetest pomegranate!" Mubarak replied, "Sir, how would I know, since my job is to take care of the trees which I do. I have never tasted the fruit of any tree to know about their sweetness." His reply impressed the master so much that he said, "You are worthy of a better position; you should serve me as an advisor. Anyone can do the gardening."

The master noted that along with honesty Mubarak had wisdom, intellect, strong faith and other qualities. He began to consult him in all kinds of matters. During this period the master was in

search of a suitable match for his daughter. He was undecided about the proposals when he thought of consulting with Mubarak. He told him that there were several requests for marriage from very prosperous and rich families for her daughter (who possessed every desirable quality) and he wasn't sure how to decide. Mubarak responded to his master, "This is not a matter to worry. In the time of ignorance people cared for just family name; Jewish people give priority to wealth, whereas the Christians mostly prefer beauty and looks. However, our Prophet Muhammad (SAW) has advised us to look for piety and righteousness when deciding for marriage."

This advice pleased the master. He made a decision in his heart and returned home. He shared the whole conversation with his wife who also praised Mubarak's wisdom and his affinity with religion. Then he shared the thought that was brewing inside him, "Why don't we wed our daughter to Mubarak? I find him the most righteous in the whole city." At first the master's wife was shocked to hear that her husband was considering a slave to be their son-in-law. Then he said something which can be a guiding light for Muslim parents in all ages when looking for a match for their sons/daughters. He said, "If we know and believe that our Prophet's words are true and there is goodness in following them then we should marry our daughter to Mubarak without any worry."

This wealthy businessman accorded importance to the Prophet's advice and put his trust in Allah by valuing Mubarak's character. Allah rewarded him by blessing his daughter with a child whose righteousness became a source of light for all. On the contrary, if he had chosen a spouse for his daughter based on a worldly trait, perhaps no one would have known him and his grandson in history. And of course the real reward is the reward of the hereafter.

Birth

As a result of this blessed union, the couple was granted a son in the year 118 Hijri (736 A.D.) who was named Abdullah. Since Abdullah's mother was Khawarzami and father was from Marv, he is also known as Abdullah Marozi. In those days Marv was a town in Khurasan.

Early Life

Mubarak's righteousness has been mentioned. His wife was no less in goodness of character. Both parents worked hard in bringing Abdullah up with good morals. Abdullah's parents kept their focus on teaching and encouraging him to acquire Islamic knowledge of highest standards. However, as he approached youth they realized that he had less interest in studies and religion and was more keen to hang out with friends and listen to music. He began spending more and more time with friends and drifted away from his parents' expectations. Both parents were extremely pained by the plight of their son, as his indulgence only grew in hobbies that were destructive to both this world's success as well as the hereafter. They would only wonder as to where and when they went wrong in his upbringing. They would constantly pray to Allah and make pledges about what they would do in gratitude if Allah guided their son.

Finally, Allah heard them and an incident happened that changed the course of Abdullah's life completely. One night he was in the company of his friends, engrossed in music and drinking. They all knocked off into sleep one by one as they were so drunk. Abdullah had a dream in which he saw a bird on a tree in a beautiful garden. The bird was reciting the Quran in its melodious voice. When he paid attention he realized that the bird was reciting verse 16 from Surah Al Hadeed: "Has the time yet not come for the believers that their hearts should melt for

the remembrance of Allah and for the truth that has descended?"

The dream ended right there and he woke up under its strong influence. The dream shook him so much that he said, "My Lord the moment has come!" He kept saying this while breaking the bottles of wine. Then he destroyed the musical instruments too. He sincerely repented and promised to never return to a hedonistic and sinful lifestyle. Thus he turned over a new leaf.

Abdullah on the Path of Knowledge

After the revolutionary change in Abdullah's life he gave up his previous interests. He now hated the company of his friends, parties, music and drinking. His utmost priority was to focus on acquiring knowledge.

At first, he began his quest for knowledge in his home town Murv. Murv was known for its educational activities so he benefitted from the teachers there. Then he traveled to different cities in Syria, Hijaz, Yemen, Egypt and Iraq and learned from their scholars. Allah had gifted him with great intellect as well as an exceptional memory. He would comprehend the material quickly and then memorize it as is. These two traits are the best tools to have in knowledge acquisition. Abdullah progressed rapidly in different branches of knowledge. One of his fellow students mentions his excellent memory by narrating an incident. He wrote, "Once we passed through a place where a man was giving a long speech. We stopped and listened to him. After the speech was over, Abdullah said to me, 'I have memorized his speech.' Another friend of ours challenged Abdullah to recite it and he repeated the whole speech verbatim, leaving us amazed."

Acquisition of knowledge has been difficult in all times, requiring a lot of hard work. It was even more difficult in those

days because it demanded travel to distant cities to seek knowledge from various scholars who were scattered around the Muslim empire. These travels required money which Abdullah had in abundance. After the death of his maternal grandfather Abdullah's mother inherited his entire wealth. Abdullah used this money in his quest for knowledge.

Once his father gave him 50,000 Dirhams for business. Abdullah took the money and left for a long journey. He spent his time and money in acquiring knowledge of Hadith from various scholars and worked very hard. When he returned home, his father inquired about the kind of business he invested in and what profit he had earned. He replied, "I am grateful that I did not only earn the profit of this world, but invested in a trade that is fruitful for both worlds." His father became overjoyed on hearing this and asked, "What business is that?" Abdullah directed him to the Hadith books on which he had spent all his fortune. The righteous father's face beamed with happiness as he was aware of the value of knowledge. He embraced his son and made prayers for him. Then he gave him an additional 30,000 Dirhams and said, "If there is any deficiency left in your trade then you may use this money to fulfill it. May Allah bless you in this trade and enrich you with its profit in this world and next."

Mubarak's prayers were accepted. Abdullah benefited from all the great scholars of his time. The likes of Imam Abu Hanifa, Sufyan Sauri, Imam Malik, Sufyan bin Aynia, Hisham bin Urwa, Imam Aamash and Imam Auzai were among his teachers. These are some of the famous names that everyone knows about. The list of his teachers is so long that one wonders how can someone be a student of so many people. The fact of the matter is that Abdullah spent his whole life acquiring knowledge. It seems that there was no notable scholar that he did not take classes from. Someone once asked him, "For how long will you keep learning?" He answered, "Till death; perhaps

I still do not know of something that may benefit me." This passion to learn took him to journey in every direction, so much so that Ahmed bin Hanbal who is himself known for his knowledge tourism witnesses, "There is no one who has traveled more than Abdullah for the sake of Islamic knowledge."

Even though Abdullah bin Mubarak was well-versed in contemporary fields such as Fiqh, literature, language, grammar and poetry, the great love and interest that he had for Hadith led him to an exceptionally high status as a Hadith scholar.

High Status in Hadith Sciences

When one strives for and works hard towards a certain goal Allah (SWT) makes the path easier for him. We can see this in case of Abdullah bin Mubarak who worked day and night to seek knowledge. His expertise in Hadith was to the degree that whenever scholars of Hadith disputed about any Hadith they would turn to him to decide the matter. Fasala says, "I used to frequently visit the scholars of Hadith in Kufa. Whenever a disagreement on a particular Hadith arose, people said to take it to Ibn Mubarak, the 'Hadith doctor' to settle the matter."

Abdullah bin Mubarak earned this status by continuous hard work. At times he would stay up all night. Once after Isha prayer, he was in a discussion with Ali bin Hasan on a particular Hadith, and they were so absorbed that they kept on discussing till the call for Fajr prayer. There was a time when he used to study and read books with such attention that he did not realize what was going on around him. Someone asked him, "Don't you get dreaded by reading books all the time?" He replied, "Why would I feel dreaded? I experience the company of the Prophet (SAW) and his companions in my solitude."

Soon people began to recognize Ibn Mubarak as the leading scholar of Hadith. Even his teachers began to consult him in

matters pertaining to Hadith. Ibn Moeen, who is known for having memorized Ahadith, states that Abdullah bin Mubarak narrated 21,000 Ahadith. This is why every famous book of Hadith contains many of his narrated Ahadith. Even his teachers honored him by narrating Ahadith from him. A person from Khurasan once asked Ibn Mubarak's teacher Sufyan about an issue. He replied, "Why do you ask me? You have the greatest scholar from East and West (i.e. Abdullah bin Mubarak); you should ask him. In his presence what is the need to consult me?" Another person once referred to Ibn Mubarak in front of Sufyan as scholar of the East. He corrected him by saying, "Refer to him as the scholar of East and West."

Imam Malik was also among Ibn Mubarak's teachers. He had listened to Imam Malik reciting his famous Hadith book Mauttah. He also narrated Ahadith from Imam Malik. Despite this student-teacher relationship Ibn Mubarak had an elevated status in the eyes of Imam Malik. Yahya bin Yahya Andulusi, a famous student of Imam Malik, narrates an incident of Ibn Mubarak entering the Imam's Hadith class, "Ibn Mubarak once came to Imam Malik during his class. Imam Malik got up and brought him to sit next to him. Before this the Imam had never expressed this gesture for anyone. After Ibn Mubarak sat down the lesson resumed. A reciter would keep reading. At significant points Imam Malik would pause the reading and ask Ibn Mubarak, 'Do you people (i.e. of Khurasan) have a Hadith or saying of the companions of the Prophet about this?' Ibn Mubarak would respond in a very respectful and humble manner. After a little while he excused himself and left the gathering (probably finding it inappropriate to show off his knowledge in front of his teacher; on the other hand Imam Malik did not feel any disgrace in benefiting from his highly accomplished student). Imam Malik was so impressed by his respectful etiquette that he told his students, 'This was Ibn Mubarak, the jurist of Khurasan.'"

At another time Ibn Mubarak was in the gathering of Hammad bin Zaid. The students of Hadith requested Hammad to ask Ibn Mubarak to narrate Ahadith. When Hammad asked him he exclaimed, “Subhan Allah, how can I narrate while you are present?” His teacher swore in Allah’s name, and said, “You must do it.” Now there was no other option but to honor his oath and narrate Ahadith. Out of respect for his teacher Ibn Mubarak only narrated the Ahadith that he had learned from Hammad and did not narrate any other Ahadith.

Competent and respectful students are always a source of pride for their teachers, and Ibn Mubarak had both of these traits. He mentioned himself that, “It took me twenty years of serious effort to seek knowledge, but forty years to learn proper etiquette.”

In his time the pursuit of Hadith sciences was highly regarded and all students of faith would desire to attain this honor. That is why we see a number of extraordinary personalities among Hadith scholars who were blessed with the best of qualities. Despite this the personal lives of narrators of Ahadith were scrutinized in minute details by Hadith scholars to address the grave issue of Hadith fabrication. They criticized every little thing and did not spare even small flaws and weaknesses of the narrators. Yet it is surprising to note that we find no criticism about Ibn Mubarak in the books of biographical evaluation of narrators. This is an extraordinary status that only a select few have earned.

Like every great Hadith scholar Ibn Mubarak too compiled some rules of Hadith narration. Mujeebullah Nadvi has stated some of these in his book ‘Taba Tabaeen’:

1. For a Hadith to be correct and considered authentic, it is important that all its narrators are reliable and Faqeeh (a Faqeeh to Ibn Mubarak is a person who understands the impression of words, the grammar

rules, the expressions of language and the nuance of meanings). The status of Ahadith whose narrators are reliable but not Faqeeh is a notch lower.

2. To have fewer narrators in the chain of Hadith is not a proof of its validity and authenticity. If every narrator is reliable, however, even if it is a long chain of narrators, then the Hadith will be more authentic.

3. The authenticity of a Hadith is based on the narrator having heard it himself and recording and preserving it; then narrating it with optimum responsibility.

4. Ibn Mubarak accepted the rule of Darayat (evaluating a Hadith from the assessment of its contents rather than the reliability of its narrators) only in special cases.

5. He did not approve at all if the narrator did not clearly mention his teacher.

From the early part of his youth onwards Ibn Mubarak's whole life was spent in the service of Hadith. Even though he was engrossed in the study of Hadith day and night, yet the value of this branch of knowledge remained so high in his mind that he would not tolerate at all when someone took even a slightly casual approach in this matter. Once someone inquired about a Hadith on the way. Ibn Mubarak responded with disapproval and said, "This is not the time and place for narration of Hadith." Another time the city mayor came to Ibn Mubarak along with a hired royal scribe. Ibn Mubarak thought that the royal pompousness was not in match with the sincere yearn for knowledge. He did not allow him to hear the Hadith recital. However, when the mayor got ready to leave, Ibn Mubarak followed him and held the rein of his horse (as a mark of respect for the guest). He asked, "Why are you holding my horse's rein

when you denied me the Hadith recital?" Ibn Mubarak said, "I can humble myself in order to be hospitable, but I cannot let the Hadith of the Prophet belittled."

Throne of Knowledge

Abdullah bin Mubarak's life was like that of a soldier, engaged in a constant strife. He did not station himself in one city for too long, though he mostly lived in Khurasan and Baghdad. Wherever he went he kept on augmenting his knowledge. The unusual thing was that Ibn Mubarak would join a study group as a student, but people would recognize him and become his student. The scholars and Islamic jurists of his time would be ever ready to benefit from his knowledge. Ibn Mubarak once came to the gathering of a famous Hadith scholar Hammad bin Ziyaad. Hammad did not recognize him and asked him where he was from. When he answered that he was from Khurasan he asked again, "Which city of Khurasan?" Ibn Mubarak replied that he was from the city of Marv. Hammad asked him if he knew Abdullah bin Mubarak. "I am in front of you," replied Ibn Mubarak. Hammad was overjoyed and embraced him right away.

Well known scholars like Muammar bin Rashid, Abu Ishaq al Fazari, Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal, Ishaq Rahviya, Abu Daud al Tayalisi and Fuzail bin Ayaz were among Ibn Mubarak's students. Moreover, anywhere he went people would request him to teach them and thus a study circle would begin. His students were highly impressed by his knowledge and personality. Fuzail bin Ayaz used to swear about his teacher in these words, "I have never laid my eyes on anyone like Ibn Mubarak."

Ibn Mubarak - A Balanced Personality

Ibn Mubarak's time was the best of times. The Islamic world shone with the presence of honorable Tabaeen (those who

learned from the companions of the Prophet), Hadith scholars, jurists and spiritual leaders. Even among these outstanding contemporaries, Ibn Mubarak earned a special status due to the collection of worthy qualities in his personality. Mostly people who specialize in one area or department of knowledge do not excel in other fields. Similarly, people who devote themselves to one branch of religion sometimes lack in other aspects. However, the beauty of Islam is its balance and the Prophet (SAW) was a perfect example of this balance. The noble messenger was a complete role model in every aspect of human life. His companions understood the significance of doing their best in all areas, but as time passed, some confined themselves to just studies and teaching, while others concentrated on either Jihad, worship or social welfare. In doing so they appeared to practically ignore or belittle the other aspects of religion. In effect, the various branches of Islamic faith got distributed among different factions and the number of people acting upon the Quranic instruction "Enter into Islam completely" (Surah Baqarah verse 208) decreased over time.

Abdullah bin Mubarak's personality stood out among his contemporaries in that he did not leave out any aspect of religion. His performance and character were topmost in each aspect such as scholarship, Jihad, worship, piety, service of humanity, etc. Along with all this, he was a successful merchant too. He had divided his year into three parts. Four months were given to knowledge and business, another four would be spent in Jihad, and the remaining four in Hajj travel. Usually people think that business is a worldly endeavor, thus it is improper for a religious person to spend his time in business dealings. Once a student of his, Fuzail bin Ayaz, inquired as he saw him busy in his trade, "You tell us not to care for this world while you take precious goods from Khurasan to Hijaz." Ibn Mubarak replied, "I do business only to avoid dependence on anyone, to protect my honor and self-esteem, to fulfill my obligations towards all those who have due rights on me, and to be able to worship

Allah with full focus and contentment."

Ibn Mubarak began his journey in Islam with the pursuit of knowledge, followed by increased inclination towards Jihad. The first time he experienced Jihad and risked his life in combat for the sake of Allah, he spontaneously uttered, 'Inna Lillah…' (surely we belong to Allah and to Him we shall return). Someone asked about this statement (which is usually said when one experiences a tragedy). He replied, "I spent all my life in gaining knowledge, but I found the door to Jannah here (in Jihad)." After returning from his trip he authored his book 'Al Jihad'.

In that period there were frequent battles being fought between the Romans and the Muslims. Ibn Mubarak participated in these battles and demonstrated his bravery. Once the two armies confronted each other. A Roman arrogantly came forward and called upon the Muslim army for someone to face him. A man whose face was covered in veil came out from the Muslim camp and killed him, followed by killing five more one after the other. The Muslim soldiers excitedly removed the veil from the brave Muslim fighter's face and saw that he was Ibn Mubarak. In most battles his gallantry was noteworthy. Abdur Rahman bin Mahdi says that his eyes had not seen anyone as courageous and valiant as Abdullah bin Mubarak. He did not fear death. Despite this courage, the thought of accountability in the hereafter would bring tears to his eyes. Accountability of the Day of Judgement always surrounded him. Once he was offered the Zamzam water when he was sitting near the Kaaba. He faced the Kaaba and said, "The Prophet's Hadith tells us that whatever intention we have while drinking Zamzam it is fulfilled; and I intend it to quench my thirst on the Judgement Day."

A famous scholar of Madinah Qasim bin Ahmed narrates, "Once I wondered why Abdullah bin Mubarak's rank and honor

is so high, when we are also equally diligent in prayer, fasting as well as other scholarly academic work. Soon I found my answer when he and I became colleagues in our journey to Syria. We camped at a place when the night fell. When we sat down for dinner, all of a sudden the lamps went out. One of our colleagues stood up to light the lamps again. I glanced at Ibn Mubarak and saw that his face was wet with tears. We all were uncomfortable in the pitch darkness of the moment, but for Ibn Mubarak it was a reminder of the next world, the darkness of the grave and the loneliness one has to endure there. That day I realized that it was due to this fear of accountability that had raised his ranks among people."

The first book that Ibn Mubarak wrote was 'Kitab-uz-Zuhd' in which he emphasized the importance of shunning worldly pleasures. When he lectured his students on this topic, his eyes would overflow with tears and his voice would choke. In this book he compiled the Ahadith on this topic as well as quotes of the companions and the interpretation of various verses as narrated by Tabaeen.

Spending in Allah's Way

Abdullah bin Mubarak inherited abundant wealth from his father. When he started his own business Allah blessed his efforts and his trade flourished really well. He used to spend his wealth generously for the sake of Allah's pleasure. The incidents in this regard are many and teach the rich and wealthy a great lesson. The truth of the matter is that the love of wealth and this world cannot be combined with awareness and fear of Allah in one heart. Ibn Mubarak always tried his best to have someone share food with him. He preferred to eat with a guest. He would say that a meal that is shared with others will be easier to be accountable for. At times he himself would be fasting, but would have guests over for lunch. His house in Marv was a focal point for people in need. Those who needed a

loan or wanted to get rid of the burden of interest would be at his door. Many students had their allowances fixed for them. Widows and orphans would also surround Ibn Mubarak for their needs. In addition, he would make extra effort to find indebted people in order to pay off their loans. Every year hundreds of thousands of Dirhams were spent in helping the poor and the needy.

Ibn Mubarak used to stay at an inn in the city of Raqqa on his way to Syria. There was an attendant at this inn who used to serve him and also desired to learn Hadith. Once Ibn Mubarak made his stop at the inn and did not see the attendant. Upon inquiry he was told that the attendant was indebted to a man who had him arrested when he could not pay off the loan. Ibn Mubarak went straight to the lender and found out all the details. He paid the attendant's loan and asked the lender to swear that he would not disclose to him as to who paid his loan. Then he soon left the inn and departed the city. When the young man was released and came back to the inn, he found out that Ibn Mubarak had come for a stay and had asked about him. The attendant was sorry for missing the chance to meet him. He traveled onto the route for Syria following the caravan and caught up with him. When he met with Ibn Mubarak, he told him how someone had secretly paid his loan and thus he was released. Ibn Mubarak just responded by saying, "Thank God you were saved from the trouble," and did not tell him anything more. When Ibn Mubarak passed away the lender revealed the secret.

Ibn Mubarak worked diligently in releasing people from the burden of loans and in helping them stand on their own feet. A man had a loan of 700 Dirhams. He mentioned it to Ibn Mubarak, who sent a note with the man to his treasurer, stating to pay him 7,000 Dirhams. The man in debt verbally told the treasurer that he needed 700 Dirhams. Thinking that Ibn Mubarak had made a mistake, the treasurer sent him back with a

note asking for clarification about the amount. Ibn Mubarak responded by instructing that he should give 14,000 Dirhams. The treasurer shockingly wrote back that with this kind of spending he will lose all his wealth in a matter of days. Ibn Mubarak wrote back quoting a Hadith, that "If a Muslim gives a pleasant surprise to his Muslim brother on something that he was not expecting then Allah will forgive him." Then he wrote, "Now don't you think that giving 14,000 is a good deal?"

During Hajj Ibn Mubarak's generosity was a treat to watch. He served the pilgrims with great fervor and arranged for their food by sending the goodies on camels. His companions that traveled with him for Hajj would give their money bags to him as the group leader. He would write their names and the amount on each bag and keep them safe. Then he would take care of all payments of food, lodging and every other expense and comfort, to the extent that they would also buy gifts for their families. After returning home from Hajj, he would invite all his Hajj companions to dinner and return the money bags to their owners with the whole amount still intact. At one of these dinners someone asked him why he did not tell them before that the Hajj expenses were a treat from him. He said, "If I did, people would hesitate in spending my money. This way they spend with ease and happiness and I get the reward of looking after the pilgrims." He would also remember his friends and relatives who stayed behind and he would bring back gifts for them from Makkah and Madinah.

Often times it is observed that even those people who want to live according to their faith are unable to set their priorities right. If they have made a tradition to offer Hajj every year, they will go for Hajj no matter what the circumstances are. They prefer their voluntary Hajj even though the people around them may be struck with a sudden tragedy or deprived of basic needs. Ibn Mubarak was different; he used to go for Hajj annually, but if he saw someone in need and he did not have enough to both

provide for the needy and go to Hajj, he would give priority to his fellow human beings. Once when he was on his journey to Hajj, he came across a poor girl who was searching for something in garbage. He walked up to her and saw that she had a dead chicken in her hand. He asked her what she would do with it. She said, "Some tyrants have killed our father and kicked us out of our house. My brother and I are on our own, without food and clothes. We haven't eaten for two days. I left my brother at home who is too worn out because of hunger. I am going to take this dead chicken home. Even though it is Haram (prohibited), but not for us," and she began to cry. Ibn Mubarak was deeply moved by her story and cried with her. Then he gave the girl whatever he had with him and returned home with only 20 gold coins (enough for the return journey to Marv). He then told his treasurer, "Now let's go back home; I hope that Allah will accept our Hajj based on our intent."

Preaching of Islam

Abdullah bin Mubarak knew the true merit of knowledge. He was ever ready to spend on spreading the message of Islam. He cared about his students' needs and would keep an active search for students who needed scholarships. People who did not value this trait asked him why he spent so much on students' scholarships. He would reply that he supported those whose yearn for knowledge and honesty he knew personally. He would argue that those students had personal and family commitments and financial needs, and if they were to go after earning their living then who will acquire knowledge and spread it. Helping these students was therefore equivalent to helping the cause of Islam. He believed that after the end of prophethood there was nothing more worthy than to spread Islamic knowledge.

Among the various fields of knowledge he especially had keen interest in the spread of Hadith sciences. Once some people questioned him as to why he is spending on students from out of

town. His answer was: “I find them more passionate in learning Hadith. If I don’t support them, then how will they quench the sincere desire for knowledge they have? Today if their financial needs are taken care of, tomorrow they will spread the knowledge of Ahadith of our Prophet (SAW) in the Ummah. I do not know of anything more noble than this work.”

Ibn Mubarak was always concerned about the growth and success of all his students. Once in his class there was a very quiet student who never asked a question. Other students were actively engaged in interacting with the teachers and among each other. Ibn Mubarak wrote a tiny note with poetic verses on it and gave it to him. The verses meant the following:

Today you hesitate in asking

Tomorrow you will be empty handed

Poke the teacher with questions

You will find him kind and attentive towards you

Remember, if you do not cry out (for help) like widows

You will be leaving (this class) empty handed.

Ibn Mubarak advised his students to pay attention to five things:

1. Have the right intention;
2. Listen to the teacher with full focus;
3. Ponder upon the points they have heard;
4. Remember what they have heard and understood;
5. Spread what they have learnt to others.

He would tell them that if they were careless about even one of

the above points, their knowledge would remain imperfect.

Ibn Mubarak not only cared about students but was also concerned about the scholars. While he encouraged them, he often warned them as well. He reminded them that the scholars had the legacy of prophets; if they indulged in the greed for the world then where would the common person go to learn his religion and who would they look up to as role models?

Once he was asked, "Who are the lowly ones?" He replied, "Those who use religion to earn their living." Then he quoted the Prophet's Hadith that talks about the hypocrisy of scholars. He was clearly against turning the religion into a profession. He believed that when money is involved then it is not easy to maintain sincerity. That is why prophets always told their people that they expected no reward from them for delivering the message of Allah. The best approach in this path is to not desire wealth, fame, position or honor. It is unfortunate that despite such clear advice many people have turned Islamic seminars and training courses into a business. Some even sit on the Shari'ah boards of various commercial entities / banks and receive money for issuing religious verdicts (Fatawa). Many Islamic institutions are charging money for online Islamic courses. Even where the structure is not exactly profit based, there is a culture of receiving gifts and favors from people. Abdullah bin Mubarak is an exemplary role model for us in this regard, who spread knowledge and preached religion selflessly and even contributed financially instead of receiving money for his services.

Seclusion - A Priority

Abdullah bin Mubarak's personality was such that people would flock towards him with adoration wherever he went. When his popularity kept growing, he left his residence in Marv and started living in an unknown place in Kufa. When he was asked about this he said, "People like it when surrounded by

fans, but I dislike it; whereas it is disliked to be anonymous and yet I prefer it." Throughout his life many times he reflected this preference. Once he was at a drinking water station in a huge crowd. Due to pushing and shoving in the crowd he fell down. When he got up he said to his colleague, "One should live like this that people don't recognize him nor give him too much attention, special honor, or recognition."

Ibn Mubarak preferred seclusion due to three reasons. First, it gives a person time to reflect and ponder. Second, one stays away from useless talk and backbiting. Third, one is less likely to become arrogant as there is no excessive attention of people. Some people requested Ibn Mubarak that it would be really good if he did not go home right away after prayers, and instead talk to them. He said, "I leave to be with the companions of the Prophet (SAW) and those following them (Tabaeen)." People asked in surprise, "Where are the companions and those following them?" He clarified, "I spend my time in study which is indirectly being in the company of the Prophet's companions and their followers (Tabaeen). I ponder over their deeds and their legacy. What would I gain in your company as people mostly indulge in backbiting. Now that many years have passed since the early period of Islam, resisting the company of people draws one closer to Allah. The careful one should run away from people like you run away from a lion. If one guards one's religion, and does his best, it can be expected that Allah (SWT) will not let his efforts go to waste."

Despite this critique of people's behavior, Ibn Mubarak's popularity was such that his fans were present in every city and town. Once he traveled to the city of Raqqa. At the same time the caliph Haroon Rasheed was also present there. When people heard the news of Ibn Mubarak's visit, the whole city rushed to welcome him. Everyone was going in the same direction. The caliph's slave girl saw the scene from the balcony of the palace. She asked around as to whose arrival had created all this

excitement. People told her that the scholar of Khurasan Abdullah bin Mubarak was visiting. On hearing this she spontaneously commented that the real kingdom was Ibn Mubarak's, while the caliph could not gather people without the aid of his guards and servants. During that time the Muslim empire spanned three continents and a huge army was appointed to guard and serve the caliph. In this regard Ibn Mubarak's own comment reflects the truth. He told his students, "A righteous person is more honorable than a king. A king gathers people around him, while the righteous person flees from people but the people are always after him."

Abdullah bin Mubarak did not approve of getting close to the ruling class. Haroon Rashid tried to meet him several times, but he kept postponing. Ibrahim Mosuli was Haroon's courtier and loved Ibn Mubarak. He narrates, "Once Haroon insisted on arranging a meeting with Ibn Mubarak, but I kept putting it off, because I knew that if Ibn Mubarak saw something against Shari'ah at the royal court, he would openly criticize the caliph; and I feared an unpleasant outcome." All of Ibn Mubarak's companions knew that he would rather stay away from the royalty. They also knew that in his view it was detrimental for scholars to get too cozy with the royalty. Ibn Mubarak was saddened when his friend Ibn Uliya befriended some elite ministers and frequently attended their high-class gatherings. Once when Ibn Uliya came to visit Ibn Mubarak, he noticed that he seemed a bit upset. On returning home he wrote a letter to Ibn Mubarak and asked about his reserved behavior. In reply Ibn Mubarak wrote a few poetry verses conveying the message that his growing interaction with the royalty may be out of necessity but it is bound to affect his religion. Ibn Uliya understood the message and kept away from these gatherings.

Noble Character and High Morals

Abdullah bin Mubarak possessed excellence in morals and

character, as endorsed by his contemporaries. He was highly God conscious in his dealings with fellow humans. In Syria, he once borrowed a pen from someone, and later forgot to return it. When he came back to his home town Marv, he realized that the pen was still with him. He traveled all the way back to Syria to return the pen and was not content until he had done so. He used to say, "Returning one Dirham that is doubtful is better than spending 100,000 Dirhams in the path of Allah."

His life was full of incidents like this. Actions that would not bother the common person at all were serious sins in his eyes. Once he was in combat with a Zoroastrian. During fighting when it was time for the Zoroastrian to pray, Ibn Mubarak paused the fight upon his enemy's request. However, when he was bowing down to the Sun as his god, the thought of killing him crossed Ibn Mubarak's mind. Then he remembered this verse from the Quran and stopped himself. "Fulfill your promises and commitments, indeed you will be asked about them" (Surah Bani Israel, verse 34). When the enemy was done with his prayer and saw Ibn Mubarak's face reflecting the intensity of emotions, he inquired what he was thinking. Ibn Mubarak plainly told him his thought of killing him and why he had stopped. The Zoroastrian was so impressed by his answer that he later accepted Islam, saying, "The best (most fair) Lord is the Lord who will punish His friends for doing wrong even to the enemy."

On the one hand Ibn Mubarak practiced wisdom in terms of reforming the wrongs in people, and on the other hand he did not tolerate any violation of religion. He disapproved any act that was against the Sunnah. He would not compromise by staying quiet, nor did he scold people to correct them. Instead, he would make an effort to convey his message in the best possible manner. Once someone sneezed and did not say, 'Alhamdulillah'. First Ibn Mubarak waited for a bit then asked him, "What should we say when we sneeze?" He quickly said,

"Alhamdulillah". Ibn Mubarak responded by saying, "YarhamukAllah."

Some people have the habit of asking question after question to the point of annoyance when they get hold of a scholar. Typically these people do not ask questions to understand something but just to convey their own perspective, no matter how flawed or superfluous it may be. It is nearly impossible to convince these people no matter how logical the answer may be. They become upset – not just with the scholar but often with religion itself – if they are reprimanded. If they are ignored or if the scholar remains silent then they think he does not have a convincing answer to their question. Abdullah bin Mubarak had a clever way to answer such weird questions without causing any ill-will. Once a person asked him, "O Sheikh tell me what kind of habits are beneficial?" Ibn Mubarak replied, "The ones that are related to the use of intellect." He asked, "What if a person does not have intellect?" Ibn Mubarak replied, "Then he should have good manners and etiquette." The man asked again, "What if he is devoid of that too?" He said, "Then he should be compassionate and empathetic so that people consider him as sincere to them." The man did not stop at this and asked yet again, "What if he cannot do this either?" Ibn Mubarak replied, "Then he should keep quiet so that his flaws remain hidden." "And if he cannot even do that?" asked the man. "Sudden death would be beneficial for such a person so that people and he himself can be freed from his misfortune," Ibn Mubarak concluded. At another time a person asked him, "Is there anyone left who can give advice?" He responded spontaneously, "Is there anyone left who is willing to take advice?"

Golden Quotes by Ibn Mubarak

Abdullah bin Mubarak was blessed with the gift of articulation. He communicated in beautiful prose as well as poetry. Even today his golden quotes are a great inspiration for readers. On

one occasion he said, “People who cry over the inadequacy of material wealth they have become happy with just a little religion and consider it enough for themselves. Look at kings, how they neglect their religion for the sake of this world. So you should try to get closer to the Almighty and ignore the worldly riches of the kings.”

Once someone asked, “How can goodness reach the heart?” Ibn Muabarak replied, “When the heart is covered with the love of the materialistic world and sins, then purity cannot enter it.” At another occasion someone asked him, “What should one do to accomplish great deeds?” Ibn Mubarak said, “Small deeds can become huge due to the purity of intentions and great acts of righteousness can be insignificant if the intention is screwed up.”

Once Ibn Mubarak asked Musayyab bin Wazih, “Do you know what brings general discord and widespread chaos?” Musayyab replied that he did not know. Ibn Mubarak said, “When the elite is corrupted then corruption becomes widespread.” Then he said, “There are five classes of the Ummah, and when they deteriorate then the whole environment gets polluted:

1. Scholars of Islam - who are the inheritors of the prophets. If they become materialistic, then who will be the role model for the public?

2. Businessmen and traders - who are the emblem of trust and honesty. If they fall into cheating and deception then who can be trusted?

3. Fighters in the way of Allah (Mujahideen) - they leave their homes for the sake of Allah, but if they start stealing the spoils of war then how can the enemy be defeated?

4. Righteous and devout believers - they are the true

kings on earth. If their dealings are corrupted then who else can people look up to?

5. The rulers - who are the protectors of the citizens; if the shepherd turns into a wolf then who will safeguard the herd?"

Death

Abdullah bin Mubarak was 63 years old when he left for Jihad as usual towards Syria. He had only reached Hayiat, a small town near Mosul, when he fell ill. He paused the journey and waited for his condition to get better, but it only got worse. He desired for a wheat drink but when it was brought to him, he found out that it was taken from a courtier of Haroon Rasheed. He refused to have the drink. When his condition got even worse, he realized that his time had come. He asked his slave Nazr to pick him up and lay him on the bare ground. Nazr obeyed his master but became tearful upon seeing Ibn Mubarak lay on the dirt ground. When asked why he was crying, he said, "After all the wealth you have had, it is disturbing to see you so helpless lying on the ground away from home." Ibn Mubarak comforted him by saying, "Don't be sad, Nazr. I have prayed to Allah all my life that He blesses me with wealth while I am alive, so that I do not have to depend on others and can spend in His way; and may I die like a destitute, so that I can meet Allah in helplessness and He showers His mercy on me. I am grateful that Allah accepted my prayers."

A little while before his death, his voice started to choke in his throat. He became anxious that he may not be able to recite the Shahadah. He told one of his students to keep reciting it loudly in front of him, so he would listen and be able to repeat. During this recital of the Shahadah his soul departed his body. It was Ramadan 181 Hijri and 798 A.D.

When the news of his death reached the locals, people began

gathering from far and wide, even though he was in a foreign land. Upon seeing such a huge funeral, the governor of Heera thought that he should report the death to the caliph. He wrote to Haroon Rasheed, “There was a foreigner who passed away here and a sea of people gathered for his funeral prayer. When I investigated I was told that it was the funeral of Abdullah bin Mubarak Khurasani.” When Haroon Rasheed read the letter he said, “We are indeed from Allah and to Him we shall return.” He then ordered his minister Fuzail bin Rabee to announce to the public that people should come to him to pay their condolences on the death of Ibn Mubarak. When Fuzail did not give importance to the order, Haroon Rasheed recited a few tragic verses of poetry to show that the incident had really touched him. The person who narrated this incident stated that when he saw the reaction of the caliph on Ibn Mubarak’s death, he realized the meaning of the Quranic verse: “Those who believed and did righteous deeds, Allah will instill their love in people’s hearts.” (Surah Maryam, verse 96).

When his student and famous spiritual leader Fuzail bin Ayaz heard the news of his death, he said, “May Allah have mercy on Abdullah bin Mubarak. He did not leave behind anyone like him.”

Attributes and Virtues

As mentioned, Abdullah bin Mubarak paid attention to every aspect of the Islamic way of life. He always made sure that he conveyed and propagated the true spirit and the full picture of religion. Once, someone mentioned about a man who was engrossed in his worship and would spend long hours praying. Ibn Mubarak praised him and then said, “But if you all started following him, who will follow the Prophet of Allah? Who will visit the sick and pray in people’s funerals?” He mentioned other areas, explaining the rights of people over fellow human beings.

He was always concerned about the due rights of others upon him. Due to this quality he earned a special recognition not only among the masses but also among leading scholars and pious people of his time. One incident that is quoted in the books is as follows. Once there was a gathering of the top ranked scholars and religious people. A discussion started on who is the greatest of all spiritual leaders and scholars that can be followed in every aspect. Soon everyone came to the conclusion that no one was a match for Abdullah bin Mubarak. He excelled in Islamic jurisprudence, literature, grammar, language, speech and poetry. Additionally, he was also ahead of his contemporaries in worship, Jihad, Hajj, avoidance of gossip, treatment of friends and family, fairness in dealings, etc. Imam Zahbi narrates this by stating: "What quality does Abdullah bin Mubarak not possess? Compassion, worship, sincerity, Jihad, awesome knowledge, perseverance in religion, politeness and courage; I swear to Allah that I love him and I hope this love will bring goodness for me." Sufyan Sauri was deeply impressed by Ibn Mubarak and said, "I tried hard to live my days and nights like Ibn Mubarak just for one year, but could not manage it." Sometimes he would wish that his entire life be like three days of Ibn Mubarak. Sufyan bin Ainiya said about Abdullah bin Mubarak, "I studied the lives of the companions in comparison to Ibn Mubarak and except for the company of the Prophet (SAW), I did not find him to be lacking in anything as compared to the companions."

People came from far and wide to seek his prayer, since his prayer was known to be accepted by Allah. Once a blind man came to Ibn Mubarak and he prayed for his eyesight to return. Indeed after some time he began to see. Abu Wahab narrated this incident and stated that he himself was a witness.

Haroon Rasheed recognized Abdullah bin Mubarak's scholarship and piety despite the fact the Ibn Mubarak would try to avoid him. The caliph considered Ibn Mubarak's

scholarship as a great asset of the Ummah. Once a man who was corrupted in his beliefs was brought before the caliph. Haroon announced the death penalty for him. The man said, "What will you do about the one thousand false Ahadith that I have spread?" Haroon calmly said, "O enemy of Allah, what are you thinking? We have Hadith scholars like Abu Ishaq Fazari and Abdullah bin Mubarak who know how to sift through Ahadith, and they will throw out every false letter that you have fabricated."

A poet praised Abdullah bin Mubarak in the following words:

The night Abdullah left Marv

All its light and liveliness ended

When righteous scholars are mentioned anywhere

It seems that all are stars and you are the moon.

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Naima Sohaib, 40, is the author of *"Islami Tareekh ki Qabil-e-Fakhr Shakhsiat"*, a 480-page book in Urdu about fifteen eminent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author. It is the sequel of her first book *"Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shakhsiat"* which discusses twenty prominent Muslim personalities and has seen its fourth edition.

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HASAN BASRI

Naima Sohaib

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Translated by Asma Farooq

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

After the death of Umar bin Abdul Aziz, the fifth rightly guided caliph, the Umayyad rulers adopted a lifestyle of grandeur, luxury, pleasure and hypocrisy. This attitude started seeping into the lifestyles of the masses. There was a great danger that the Muslims would lose the values that had been instilled in them by Prophet Muhammad (SAW). At this point, Hasan Basri emerged as a beacon of light and hope in a dark era of moral and spiritual decadence. His close association with the companions of the Holy Prophet (SAW) had ingrained in him a deep fear of Allah and a sense of accountability in the Hereafter. He used his public speeches and sermons to reignite the true spirit of Islam into the masses.

Allah bestowed upon him such qualities that are rare to find in one individual. He had a profound knowledge of the Quran and Hadith combined with eloquence, wisdom, moral courage and a sense of justice. His dynamic personality makes him one of the great heroes of Islamic history.

May Allah reward Sohaib Umar for his help with the editing and formatting of this booklet and Naima Sohaib for inspiring and encouraging me to complete this translation.

Asma Farooq

Hasan Basri

The Great Scholar and Ascetic of Basra

Introduction

His name was Hasan and his kuniyat was Abu Saeed. Due to his lengthy stay in Basra, he acquired the title of Basri. Since he traded in jewels and gems, he was also known as Hasan Luluee (Hasan of pearls).

His father Yasar was born in a small town in Iraq called Maysan. He was a jeweler and an expert in his field. This is the time when Muslims were advancing swiftly, conquering one territory after another. After Basra, Maysan was also conquered and Yasar was brought as a prisoner of war to Madinah. Here, Yasar was handed over to the famous companion of the Holy Prophet (SAW) Zayd bin Thabit (RA). Under his influence Yasar converted to Islam. Impressed by his righteousness and piety, Zayd (RA) freed him and gave him some money so he could start earning his livelihood.

Yasar used this money to restart his jewelry business. When his financial status improved, he thought it was a suitable time to get married. A well-wisher suggested Khayra, a slave girl of Umm-e-Salma (Mother of the believers). Yasar took his advice and married Khayra in 20 A.H.

Birth

Hasan Basri was born in Madinah Munawwarah in 21 A.H. (642 A.D.) during the last part of Umar Farooq's caliphate. At this time, the glorious and noble companions of the Prophet were still alive. After his birth, Yasar went to Umar (RA) and requested him to suggest a name for the newborn. The second caliph named him Hasan and supplicated for his well-being.

According to another source, his mother Khayra requested Umm-e-Salma (RA) to name the baby. Since he was a beautiful baby, she named him Hasan. His childhood was spent in Umm-e-Salma's house who used to take care of him while Hasan's mother Khayra was performing the household chores. Some traditions mention that Umm-e-Salma (RA) might have even suckled Hasan Basri. However, this is less likely due to her advanced age at that time. Due to the fact that he was brought up in the house of Umm-e-Salma (RA), Hasan would also freely visit the houses of the other wives of the Prophet (SAW). He would regularly attend the gatherings of the great companions. The early years of his childhood were well spent in the radiant environment of Madinah in the shade of the Prophet's mosque. Hasan continued to frequent the houses of the wives of the Prophet (SAW) without any restriction until the caliphate of Usman (RA) – at that time his age was 14 or 15 years. He would sit in their company and derive immense benefit from their knowledge and piety.

Education

From an early age Hasan had an inclination towards religion. Like his parents, he was righteous and pious by nature. He managed to finish memorization of the Holy Quran when he was only twelve years old, partly due to the influence of the companions of the Prophet.

Whilst memorizing he would also ponder deeply over the verses of the Quran. To understand their interpretation and to hear their explanation in the Hadith of the Holy Prophet he would consult great companions like Usman, Ali, Abu Musa Ashaari, Abdullah bin Umar, Abdullah bin Abbas, Anas bin Malik, Jabir bin Abdullah and Imran bin Haseen (may Allah be pleased with all of them). According to Abu Bakr Al Hazlee: "He would study a Surah (chapter of the Quran) till he had complete understanding of the background and context in which it was

revealed, its explanation and interpretation, and would then move on to the next one." He would attend the gatherings of the companions of the Prophet as well as that of Taba'een (the next generation after the companions) to obtain the knowledge of Hadith. Hasan Basri benefited from Ammar bin Yasir (RA), Abu Hurairah (RA), Usman bin Abi al Aas and Muaaqil bin Sanan in this regard.

Apart from these fundamental fields of knowledge, he had a natural grasp over languages and few could match his eloquence, rhetoric and mastery of the Arabic language.

He moved from Madinah to Basra when he was around 15 or 16 years old. Even though he had learnt the skills of the jewelry trade from his father, his heart was inclined towards acquisition of knowledge and not towards worldly business. This zest for knowledge continued in Basra, which was at that time a center of Islamic sciences and knowledge. Basra's grand mosque was alive with the study circles of the companions and the Taba'een. Here he found a great opportunity to quench his intellectual and spiritual thirst. He gained proficiency in different fields of Islamic knowledge especially Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). Within a short span of time, his intelligence, devotion and Allah's special help enabled him to easily solve complex religious / jurisprudential issues. His intellect, knowledge and piety attracted people towards him.

Public Recognition

Since Hasan Basri frequently attended scholarly gatherings and kept the company of pious men, he was already known in these circles. As his scholarly capabilities became more apparent, Hasan Basri's popularity amongst the masses increased as well. People would ask him questions related to Tafseer, Hadith and Fiqh. Before long, a time came that wherever he went a crowd would gather around him and he would do his best to fulfill all their needs. Allah had bestowed upon him a religious insight

that very few are blessed with. Qatadah says, “I swear by Allah that I have not seen anyone with opinions as similar to Umar bin Khattab as Hasan Basri”. Rabi bin Anas says, “I frequently visited Hasan for ten years and every time I learnt something new from him.”

The number of people that started turning towards him for Tafseer of the Quran increased to an extent that he had to start regular lectures. He would exercise great caution in relating Ahadith of the Prophet (SAW). He would say: “If Allah had not taken a covenant from the scholars to share and spread knowledge I would never relate a Hadith in answering your questions.” This level of caution and fear of Allah only served to increase his popularity. People were not merely impressed with his knowledge; their trust in him increased when they saw the effect of this knowledge on his character and personality. He was highly committed in offering non-compulsory (Nafl) prayers, fasting regularly and following the Sunnah in his daily life. He would cry so much whilst reciting the Quran that his beard would become wet with his tears. His view regarding scholars and experts in Fiqh was that a scholar is actually one who fears Allah and is devoted to his Lord, does not care about people higher than him in status or financials, does not make fun of anyone who is lower in status than him and does not use the knowledge bestowed upon him by the Almighty to gain meager worldly benefits.

He felt uncomfortable with fame and excessive devotion of people towards him. He disliked it when anyone praised him but appreciated when someone supplicated for him. Once when he came out of the mosque there was no ride available for his journey back home. Someone offered him a ride and started walking with it whilst holding the leash of the animal. Out of respect for Hasan Basri, other people also joined in. When he saw this, he angrily said, “What is the matter with you people? If a Muslim does not keep a check on his inner self the sound of

people's footsteps is enough to destroy his heart." It was this fear that made him constantly seek refuge from pride, hypocrisy and desire for fame.

Start of Tribulations in Hasan Basri's Time

Hasan Basri had the opportunity to live through the reigns of the last two rightly guided caliphs – Usman (RA) and Ali (RA). Despite their different dispositions and character, the rightly guided caliphs had the same views and practices regarding piety, detachment from worldly temptations, worship, spirituality, knowledge and Jihad. People living in those times had great examples in the caliphs and worthy companions of the Prophet whom they could emulate to improve their own character and behavior. Due to the close proximity with the time of the Prophet (SAW), people were very concerned with saving themselves from hypocrisy, temptations and the trappings of this worldly life. However, this state of affairs did not last long.

The speed at which the political domination of Islam increased was much greater than the efforts made to transform the hearts and purify the souls of the people who came under the fold of Islam. The main reason behind this was that contrary to the Rightly Guided caliphs, the Umayyad kings indulged in hereditary politics in which character, piety, spirituality and knowledge were of much less value than lineage and ancestry. Another new development was that similar to monarchial systems, the ministers, aristocrats and courtiers would not dare express their honest views in front of the rulers. Instead, an army of sycophants would agree to everything they said. To the contrary, those who spoke their minds and stood up for the truth were sometimes punished. Political decisions were made to benefit the monarchs without much regard to Islamic laws. Religion and state started to be separated from each other, and this proved to be the starting point for the deterioration in high morals and spiritual ascension of the Muslims.

The Umayyad kings had a great zest for conquests and made significant progress in this area. However, they did not make a comprehensive policy for the religious training and education of the new Muslims that would effectively engrain the true teachings of Islam in their hearts. Many people converted to Islam impressed by the political and military dominance of the Muslims. However, due to a lack of proper guidance there was an increase in new religious beliefs, practices and innovations. No proper steps were taken to rectify this situation. Things were reaching a point where the beautiful building of Islam was in danger because the beliefs and values on which it stood were getting diluted.

Famous author Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi in his book 'Tareekh-e-Daawat o Azeemat' has analyzed the situation of the time in a comprehensive and succinct manner. He writes: "The situation was that a continuation of hereditary government (kingship) and an excess of wealth and success had given birth to hypocrisy and popularized the character and values of the wealthy and extravagant people of the previous nations. There was a general trend in society towards indulgence in luxury and pleasure. A life of faith and righteousness, which was a valuable asset of this Ummah, the secret of its strength and a precious legacy of the Prophet (SAW), was in danger at that time. There was a grave concern that the Ummah would become morally corrupt and spiritually hollow. Insensitivity, dejection, weakness of faith and apathy in one's connection with Allah were increasing with great intensity. This was a disturbing situation. The government was not only oblivious and unconcerned with the protection and nurturing of Islamic values, its representatives were the real danger to this cause as their personal characters and mannerisms were actually stimulating this moral degradation. The level of faith, connection with Allah, devotion, reverence and repentance that the Prophet (SAW) had instilled in his followers (which only a prophet can do) were now on the decline. This depravation could not be compensated with the

expansion of the empire's borders and its great conquests. Once these merits are lost they are difficult to bring back into a society (history of the previous nations is a witness to this).

If this great reservoir of righteousness was not protected and the political and social forces were left unchecked then this Ummah would have also become like the previous nations – materialistic, self-indulgent and negligent of the hereafter. The biggest fear that the Prophet (SAW) had in his last days was that the Muslims would be totally taken over by this worldly life, which in turn would destroy them just like it destroyed the earlier nations. Just a few days before his death the Prophet (SAW) clearly said in his sermon: 'I do not fear poverty and indigence for you. What I fear for you is that the world will shower down its affluence and luxuries on you as it did on the people before you, and you will also start competing amongst each other in this and it will destroy you like it destroyed those before you'.

Soon, the danger that the Prophet (SAW) had warned against manifested itself. Since Allah wanted to preserve this religion, a few sincere and fearless souls came to the forefront to counter this challenge. They used their unflinching faith, tender hearts, sermons, discourses and training to save millions from being swept away by this flood of materialism. They also played a vital role in slowing down the speed of this onslaught. They maintained the Ummah's religious and spiritual principles and teachings, which were more important to preserve than its political and ancestral traditions. They filled a gap in the existence of the Ummah, which would prevent them from becoming a characterless, faithless and impassive group of people. The most prominent amongst the group of Taba'een and accomplished people who came forward to fight this trial were Saeed bin Jubair, Muhammad bin Sirin and Sha'abee. However, the real adversary to this danger and the flag-bearer of the spiritual movement is Hasan Basri (may Allah's mercy be on

him)."

The Great Reformer

Hasan Basri had to fight on numerous fronts. On one side was the increasing desire for this worldly life in comparison to the hereafter and on the other was the rapid replacement of sincerity with hypocrisy. In addition to this, the people in power were fanning mischief and evil. A fourth dimension was the springing up of new sects which were questioning the very foundations of faith. Among these the prominent ones were Qadriya, Jabriya and the Mutazilites. The trend of extremism in religion and lack of morality and character in others led the religious segment of the society in assuming themselves to be more pious and superior to others. This attitude brought with it the danger of pretension.

In these trying times, Allah chose Hasan Basri to stand up to these challenges. According to Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi: "Allah had gifted him with all the capabilities that were essential in those times to elevate the honor of Islam and make his call effective. His dynamic personality was captivating and engaging. He was highly accomplished and insightful in matters of religion, Tafseer of the Quran and Hadith sciences without which any effort for reformation was not possible. He had also spent a considerable time with the companions of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and it seemed that he had deeply observed and reflected on their way of life. He had a deep understanding of the changes taking place in the lives of the Muslims and in the Islamic society. He was completely aware of the various strata of the society at that time and their way of living. Like an expert doctor, he had knowledge of their qualities and their diseases. Together with all these attributes, he was also an articulate, eloquent and effective speaker. People would be highly influenced by his wise discourses. They found a cure for all their ailments in his words."

Countering the Trials of Materialism with Concern for the Hereafter

Hasan Basri was observing the rapid rise of materialism in the Islamic society. He feared that if this was not controlled, a time may come in which apart from beliefs there would be no visible or substantive difference left between a Muslim and a non-Muslim society. These beliefs would be professed verbally and will adorn the books but would have no place in a person's priorities and daily practices.

He started to regularly remind people in his sermons of the transitory nature of this world and the permanence of the hereafter. He was of the opinion that heedlessness caused by materialism had made the Muslims careless with regards to their character, morals, dealings with others and even their worship. On one occasion he mentioned the time of the blessed companions and said: "I have seen people who were more mindful in matters of Halal (permissible) than you are in matters of Haram (forbidden)." He would also say: "I have never seen a person who has desired this world and gained the hereafter. On the contrary, one who desires the hereafter also receives worldly gains."

When a man questioned him regarding the hereafter as opposed to this worldly life, he said: "Listen! The example of this world and the hereafter is like that of the east and the west. Whichever end you are close to, the other will become that much further from you. Decide yourself which direction you want to be closer to. You ask me about this world; what can I say about its affairs? Its first part is struggle and hardship, and its end is death and decay. You will be held accountable for the permissible things in it and will have to face punishment for its forbidden things. Whoever becomes involved in its permissible things has been tested and whoever is deprived of them becomes unhappy."

People would complain to Hasan Basri that their hearts had gone to sleep and that his advice did not affect them. He would respond: “I wish that they were asleep; we could have shaken them out of their slumber. But the reality is that they are dead. No matter how much you shake them, they will not wake up.” He then said: “How unfortunate! People have been destroyed by their desires and wishful plans. There are verbal claims but no sign of action. There is knowledge but no patience (to fulfill its demands). There is faith but it is devoid of conviction. People are in great numbers but intellect is rare. There is great commotion of people but not one person with whom the heart connects. People entered (the faith) and then left. They learnt everything and then denied it. First they forbade something and then later made it permissible.”

When people enquired about the reality of religion, he described the state of majority of the masses in these words: “What is your faith? Just something to relish? If someone asked you whether you believed in the day of reckoning, one gets the answer in the affirmative, with swear upon the Lord of the day of recompense.” Then he compared this kind of faith and belief to the faith of Allah’s righteous servants and said: “I swear by Allah that there is none worthy of worship except him. These servants of Allah proved truthful and steadfast (in their speech and faith). They practiced what they preached. However, you are only occupied with your vain desires. People! Beware of these desires because Allah does not bestow anything from this world or the hereafter on the basis of mere desires.”

On another occasion expressing his disapproval of worldly life he said: “Sadly, we have committed many injustices against ourselves. We have weakened our faith and our worldly desires and greed have strengthened our bodies. Our character has fallen into decay but our clothes and bedding are new. There is one amongst us who lies around enjoying himself and heedlessly usurps the wealth of others.” Then he said: “Your

food is from stolen money and your demanding service from others is slavery. You demand something sweet after eating savory food. After a cold drink, you drink something hot. You want to eat moist dates after dry dates. When your stomach hurts and you feel like throwing up you raise a commotion in the house to bring you something to help digest the food. O ignorant soul! By Allah, you will not be able to digest anything but your faith. Look O fool, where is your neighbor and what state is he in? Where is the hungry orphan of your society? Where is the needy man who keeps looking towards you? Where are the people that Allah ordered you to take care of? I wish you knew that you were nothing but a digit in a number. With each sunrise, your life decreases by one day."

Hasan Basri identified the human emotions of sadness and sorrow as one of the signs of detachment from worldly life. How can someone – who knows for sure that everything including himself will end and is uncertain as to what his own fate will be – remain happy and complacent? He will be without any doubt concerned about what lies ahead for him. Hasan Basri's own state was such that fear of Allah and His accountability on the Day of Judgment would keep him awake in the night. According to Yunus bin Ubayd: "When Hasan came from somewhere it seemed as if he had just buried a close relative. Whilst sitting he used to look like a prisoner who has been given the death sentence and when he mentioned hell it seemed that it was made only for him."

The hereafter was frequently mentioned in his gatherings. Hasan Basri would say: "A believer wakes up sorrowful and reaches the evening in the same condition. A handful of dates and some water should be sufficient for him to survive in this world just like it is enough for a baby goat." Regarding the remembrance of the hereafter and disinterest in this worldly life he would say: "If you recite the Quran and also believe in it then your distress in this world should be lengthy, your fear

intense and you should call out to your Creator with great persistence."

Hasan Basri would also say, "I saw a lot of companions of the Prophet whose clothes would be simple and inexpensive. If you saw them, you would consider them crazy. If they saw the virtuous amongst you they would surely think that they had no good in them. And if they saw the wrongdoers amongst you, they would say that they have no faith in the Day of Judgment. I swear by Allah that I have also seen such people who would value this world even less than the dirt under their feet. And I have also seen people that would embark upon a journey with minimal provision and would say regarding this provision that I will not consume all of it but will give some in charity. Therefore, he would give charity out of this minimal provision even though the donor would be in more need than the one receiving it."

Anyone who saw Hasan Basri could easily determine the condition of his heart. He would be in a state of distress due to his intense fear of Allah. His tears would constantly flow whilst reading the Quran. He disliked it when people indulged in useless and vain talk. He considered excessive laughter and jokes harmful for the heart. He used to say: "A believer's laughter is a result of a negligent heart. Too much laughter deadens the heart."

In his sermons he would say that the love of wealth and desire for luxuries was a major factor in bringing about weakness of faith. His words did seem bitter, as they were a reflection of the truth, but people knew that his analysis of their spiritual ailments was accurate. Therefore, they continued to attend his sermons in great numbers. His articulation and sincerity in speech influenced the lives of thousands. A majority of the masses started regarding him as a messiah who would cleanse them of their spiritual and moral diseases and strengthen their

faith.

Hasan Basri …. Identifying the Moral Diseases of the Muslim Ummah or the Founder of Sufism

Hasan Basri was regarded as the founder of Sufism in the later period of Muslim history. The spiritual chain of Tasawwuf or Sufism started being connected to Ali (RA) through Hasan Basri. Even though only Allah knows the reality, this claim does not seem to be true. Firstly, according to the experts in Hadith sciences there is no historical evidence of Hasan Basri gaining any spiritual guidance from Ali (RA). Moreover, he himself never claimed to teach any field of knowledge that was not taught to the Muslims before. In fact, he always tried to connect people with the Quran and Sunnah and was against any practice that was contrary to the way of the Prophet (SAW). However, he was ascetic by nature, worshipped ardently and was extremely concerned about purifying the inner self. He had the foresight to know that the thirst for worldly knowledge in Muslims was compromising their concern for their spiritual well-being.

A large number of Muslims – then and now – do make an effort to avoid the forbidden things but squander their Halal wealth on useless activities. They are careless about the hereafter and the need to prepare for life after death. Observing their daily routine, it seems as if they are not completely aware of the purpose of life. They are using their time, resources and skills to improve their worldly life instead of the hereafter. They have increased the scope of permissible needs and wants to a point where they are comfortable in putting all their efforts in useless activities. If they are reminded, they say with great conviction that it is permissible and there is no harm in enjoying Halal material pleasures. The fact is that over-indulgence in the permissible things of this worldly life is called extravagance which is prohibited in Islam.

Hasan Basri observed that people had fallen prey to their desires and had failed to understand and recognize the trappings of the devil. Therefore, like every great reformer he apprised people of the diseases of the society and identified the factors that caused them. He understood the pulse of his time. If he tried to cure the diseases of the heart through his sermons it was not his own innovation but he only tried to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet (SAW) and his companions. He would say to people: "Follow the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW); by Allah, he stayed away from a life of luxury. Large utensils were never used in his house in the morning or evening. He would never close the doors of his house on anyone, neither did he put guards outside his door. The Prophet (SAW) would not mind sitting on bare ground and having his meal there on a piece of cloth. He would wear coarse clothing and felt no shame in it. He would ride a donkey and if the need arose, he would offer someone else to ride with him too. After finishing his meals he would lick his fingers."

Hasan Basri would try to make people understand that Allah does not mind them to eat and drink but they should not be extravagant, as Allah does not like excess in anything. There is no harm in enjoying the blessings of Allah. In fact, if one is truly grateful it is a source of blessing. However, if these blessings are used only to fulfill vain desires of one's body then they will surely be a cause of retribution on the Day of Judgment. He used to advise people to be concerned about the purification of their souls and not to be heedless in this matter. The Prophet (SAW) himself supplicated to Allah in the following words: "O Allah, grant my soul its piety and purify it, for You are the best to purify it. You are its protector and guardian" (Muslim).

Hasan Basri gave beneficial and practical advice in this regard: "Perfection in spiritual development comes from four things: to eat less, to speak less, to reduce mingling with people and to

sleep less. Nothing is more rebellious in this world than one's self. Therefore, if a person is overwhelmed by fear and reverence of Allah, then this is a good sign as this feeling will overpower the self and in turn will subdue a person's desires and prevent human weaknesses from surfacing." He was also of the opinion that excessive speech is harmful for purification of the self. He would say, "A wise man's tongue is behind his heart. When he wants to say something, he consults his heart. If his heart allows him he says it, otherwise he refrains from opening his mouth. On the other hand, an ignorant person's heart is at the tip of his tongue. He does not consult it, and just utters whatever words come on his tongue."

Hasan Basri would try to stop people from over-indulgence in eating and drinking. He disapproved of excessive laughter and jokes and would say that even if a Muslim has free time he should busy himself in the remembrance of Allah as he will be held accountable for every moment of his life. Therefore, a person should abstain from anything that could lead to heedlessness.

Condemnation of Extreme Behavior in Renunciation of Worldly Life

The rise of materialism in that era led to concern amongst a few other sincere men to focus on eradicating this malady. Amongst them one group transgressed the limits of moderation and started shunning worldly pleasures altogether. These people would leave urban areas, wear thick woolen garments and do extreme spiritual exercises. When this monastic way of life started seeping into the Muslim society, Hasan Basri came forward to strictly forbid this way of life. He felt that these people had started assuming themselves better than others. Their arrogance and self-righteousness made them consider other Muslims as inferior and materialistic. Hasan Basri explained that piety is not just having an external appearance of

a saint and making verbal claims of renouncing this worldly life. In fact, the essence of piety is deeds done with sincerity and devoid of any pretense.

Whilst speaking about the saints clad in thick garments he said that those claiming piety have in reality pride and arrogance concealed in the depths of their hearts, even though their attire shows modesty and simplicity. These blanket-clad men are more conceited than the ones in expensive cloaks. On another occasion, he said that humility is not just verbally condemning the self but actually believing that others are better than one's own self. To publicly condemn and reproach oneself in front of others amounts, in reality, to exalting one's own ego as such a person wants others to presume that he is righteous.

Hasan Basri knew that even though materialism was destroying the character and morals of the Muslims, extremist behaviors in worship and complete rejection of worldly life were no less harmful. Therefore, he would instruct people to avoid extremism and exaggeration in purification of the self and renunciation of worldly pleasures. He himself would occasionally wear fine clothes and following the tradition of the Holy Prophet (SAW) would sometimes wear a Yemeni cape and robe of good quality.

One day a young man came to him expressing his desire to become a devotee and ascetic. Hasan Basri advised him to continue striving hard to earn a Halal livelihood and at the same time engage in worship as per his ability and capacity. Thus, Hasan Basri made it clear to the people that one should hold on to the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) and adopt a moderate way of life. Giving up that which is lawful (either to show off or in reality), withdrawing from worldly life completely, viewing oneself as pious and deeming others inferior are such deeds that do not help fulfill the real purpose of piety. In fact, these things work to the contrary.

Many people following the ascetic path relinquish worldly life to save themselves from its apparent trials but get entangled in the trappings of the devil in their inner selves and go astray. Hasan Basri (who was considered the leader of Sufis and master of spirituality) had already identified these dangers. Sadly, in later times many leading figures of Sufism conveniently used Hasan Basri's personality to support their point of view but did not follow his instructions to follow the Shari'ah and in particular stick to the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW). They also did not heed his condemnation of leaving the moderate path in purifying one's self. Similar to other religions, a certain group among Muslims also took only what suited them from the teachings of prominent personalities. Not only this, it became a widespread practice to relate fabricated and false stories in their name. The truth is that if these sincere personalities could come back to this world they would disassociate themselves from many of the practices of their devotees and expose the lies of those claiming to follow them.

Resisting the People in Power…Proclamation of the Truth and Seeking Repentance

There was great political instability at the time of Hasan Basri. The policies and behavior of the Umayyad rulers did not conform to the inherent nature of Islam and consistently violated the rules of equity and justice. The religious segment of the society would be distressed to see the limits to which the leaders would go to alter the very nature and destroy the image of the religion – the same religion for whose glorification the Prophet (SAW) and his companions gave great sacrifices. Almost all prominent scholars of the time fulfilled their duty of proclaiming the truth. There were also some armed encounters with the rulers but they proved to be unsuccessful.

Hasan Basri's stance regarding this situation was that he stayed away from political movements and attempts to topple the

government by force. There were several attempts of political change during the Umayyad regime. People would ask him why he did not come out and help change the prevalent conditions. He would reply, “If people remain patient when tested by their rulers it will not be long before Allah takes them out of this difficulty. However, those who are quick to take out their swords and start relying on them, by Allah, this never bring out positive results.” He used to say, “Conditions should not be changed with swords but through repentance.” When people would ask him to approach the elite class and enjoin good and forbid them from evil, he would say: “A believer should not degrade his self. The swords of the rulers of our time have surpassed our tongues. When we talk to them they answer us back with their swords.”

When Ibne Ash’as decided to stand up against Hajjaj bin Yusuf, he managed to get the support of a few Tab’aeen (generation following the companions of the Prophet). People pressurized Hasan Basri to join them but he left as soon as he got a chance. When people enquired about his views on joining them, he said, “Don’t take sides with either of the parties.” A Syrian man came forward and asked “Not even the side of the Amir-ul-Momineen (leader of the Muslims)?” Hasan Basri pushed back his hand and said, “Yes! Not even the Amir-ul-Momineen.”

Hasan Basri’s dealings with the rulers were such that he avoided any kind of altercation with them but if the situation demanded it, he did not hesitate in stating the truth. When Hajjaj built his palace in Basra, scores of people flocked to see it. Hasan Basri was upset when he saw that its grandeur and beauty had become the talk of the town. He said: “O people! Among the abominable people who built great structures to glorify their worldly life is the Pharaoh of Egypt. He built a skyscraper whose floors were above the clouds. Allah made him sink in the depths of the ocean and destroyed his palace with a flash of lightning. I wish Hajjaj knew that the dwellers of the

heavens dislike him and the ones on the earth are deceiving him." Whilst he was saying this, a well-wisher interrupted: "Stop! Stop! Abu Saeed." Hasan Basri replied," Allah has taken an oath from the people of knowledge to state the truth clearly and to never breach this trust." Then he left.

Hajjaj was furious when he found out about this incident and said, "A son of a slave came and said all this about our palace and you all just listened to him?" He then sent for Hasan Basri who was brought before him in chains. Everyone present was terror stricken as they knew the outcome of the dialogue that was about to take place. As per routine, Hajjaj's executioners were ready to act with their hands on their swords. However, the strange thing that happened was that Hajjaj called Hasan Basri close to himself, enquired about a few scholarly issues and then respectfully let him leave. When he came out people asked him how all this happened. It was no less than a miracle to escape safe and sound from Hajjaj's cruelty and injustice. Hasan Basri replied, "I just kept muttering under my breath 'O Guardian of blessings and my shelter in difficulty! Turn this torture of Hajjaj into peace and blessings for me just like you made the fire a place of peace and security for Ibrahim (AS)."

Hajjaj bin Yusuf used to consider himself superior to others because of his knowledge, power and linguistic ability. Once during a conversation with Khalid bin Safwan, Hajjaj enquired: "In your opinion who is the real leader of Basra right now?" Khalid, who was a devoted fan of Hasan Basri, replied without any hesitation: "Hasan Basri." Surprised, Hajjaj exclaimed: "But Hasan is the son of slaves." Ibne Safwan responded: "Deep insight is required to understand the true meaning of leadership. The truth is that Hasan is the real leader of Basra. Don't you see that everyone, young and old, is dependent on him regarding matters of faith? Everyone in Basra quotes him and seems eager to listen to his advice. People are anxious to get to his gatherings and attend his sermons day and night in

order to learn something from him." On hearing this Hajjaj was compelled to say: "By Allah! This is what you call real leadership."

The ruling class held Hasan Basri in high regard as he did not engage in direct conflict with them but when the need arose he always stood up for the truth. Yazid bin Abdulmalik appointed Omar bin Habeerah as the governor of Khorasan and Iraq during his rule. Some of the commands of Yazid were cruel and tyrannical and clashed with the Shari'ah. Omar was worried that if he implemented these orders he might be held accountable by Allah whilst on the other hand he had taken oath to carry out the orders of the caliph. He decided to seek the advice of Hasan Basri and Imam Sha'abee regarding this issue. Imam Sha'abee advised him to act wisely and avoid unnecessary arguments. When Hasan Basri remained silent, Omar turned towards him and requested him for an answer. He said: "O Ibne Habeerah! Fear Allah regarding Yazid and do not fear that Yazid can cause you any harm. Remember that Allah will protect you from the evil of Yazid but Yazid will not be able to save you from the punishment of Allah. Remember that very soon Allah will send an angel to you who will bring you down from your throne and throw you in to the confines of your grave. At that time, nothing will save you except your deeds. Allah has created government for the help and assistance of His people. So do not use this authority to be unjust to His creation. O son of Habeerah! Understand this clearly that there is no obedience to any creation if it involves disobedience to the Creator."

Tears were flowing from Omar bin Habeerah's eyes whilst Hasan Basri was giving him this advice. He then kissed Hasan Basri's hands and respectfully bade him farewell. When Imam Sha'abee came out he said to the people: "My advice to Ibne Habeerah was based on prudence and practicality while Hasan's advice kept Allah's will in mind, truly worthy of a scholar. Allah distanced me from Ibne Habeerah while his respect and

regard for Hasan became even greater than before."

Similarly, once he saw a few people who were specialists in recitation of the Holy Quran waiting to see the governor. Hasan Basri angrily told them: "What are you eagerly waiting here for? Get up and leave. By Allah, if you stay distant from the worldly life of these privileged people then they will be more interested in matters of faith. And if you try to be a part of their world they will start losing interest in religion."

During his caliphate, Umar bin Abdul Aziz would regularly seek Hasan Basri's advice. Once he wrote to Hasan Basri asking him for a piece of advice that would benefit him in everything he did. He wrote back: "Remember! If Allah's help and assistance is with you then you should remain calm and have no fear. If He does not help you, then you should not have expectations from anyone. The only way of attaining Allah's pleasure is to strictly follow his commandments and to avoid the style and mannerisms characteristic of kingship."

Countering Ideological Trials and Discouraging Sectarian Divisions

After the death of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) until the caliphate of Ali (RA) there was no division in the Ummah regarding religious beliefs and philosophy. Ali (RA) fought the Kharijites when they tried to propagate their specific beliefs and views. They remained a small faction and the Ummah as a whole was not drawn towards them. During the Umayyad dynasty not only political issues increased in frequency and intensity, ideological and philosophical controversies also gained momentum.

The practice of using religion for one's own convenience started when a group of brave Muslims decided to raise their voices against the injustices of the rulers. When the ruling class was questioned about their actions, they would cite evidence from

Islam, saying that don't you remember that everything happens with Allah's will? He is the one who does everything and that His will is included in everything we do. The people behind spreading this line of argument were mainly the close aides and advisors of the king. Based on this weak argument they wanted to keep avenues open for oppression and injustices committed by the kings. This new school of thought regarding divine predestination was given the name 'Jabriya'. When Hasan Basri would be asked to give his opinion regarding this strange and peculiar logic given by the kings and their cohorts in defense of murdering and looting of Muslims that it is all Allah's will, he would clearly state that these enemies of Allah are lying and that under no circumstances is it permissible to blame one's own bad deeds on predestination.

Contrary to these beliefs, another group adopted the opinion that man, not Allah, is the creator of whatever good or bad is done by him. They went to the other extreme in their views and started arguing about the issue of predestination. People gave this group the name 'Qadriya'. One of the followers of this sect by the name of Ma'abad Jahni came to Hasan Basri and kept pressing him to give evidence in favor of his point of view and against the Jabriya sect. His incessant questions angered Hasan Basri and he said "Aaitazal anna" meaning leave us alone and go from here. This person later on became the founder of Mu'tazilah school of thought.

Hasan Basri would try to correct these new beliefs and sects and warn people regarding them in his sermons and lectures. However, he was against cutting off people with different viewpoints from the Ummah, as this would create greater chances of dissension and separation. People from all schools of thought would visit him. He did not consider it incorrect to keep friendly relations with them, as this was necessary for their reformation. Hasan Basri thought it would be even more difficult to correct them if ties were completely cut off. Some

sects, especially Qadriya, took advantage of this approach and started portraying him as a supporter of their beliefs. The reality of the matter was that he did not support the wrong views of Jabriya and at the same time did not become a part of the Qadriya movement. He always refrained from adopting an attitude of hatred and prejudice when associating with different kinds of people and groups.

Intense Propagation of Virtues and Ethics

Hasan Basri's sermons did not focus merely on detachment from worldly life. He would frequently talk about moral excellence attained because of strong faith. On one occasion, he said, "A believer's greatest attribute is his strong faith. He should be one with strong beliefs and conviction. He should have forbearance whilst gaining knowledge and this forbearance should beautify his knowledge. A believer should be intelligent and soft spoken. If he is poor, his outlook and self-control should conceal his poverty and deprivation. If he is wealthy, then he should not leave the path of moderation. When spending he should be sympathetic towards people and generous and forgiving towards the distressed; bighearted and liberal when giving people their rights; tireless and resolute in establishing justice and should never wrong anyone even if he disliked them.

He should not exceed the boundaries of Shari'ah in support of someone he loves. He should not be a faultfinder, neither should he be sarcastic nor the one to point fingers at others. He should not slander or taunt others and should stay away from non-beneficial things. He should not have any interest in vain pastimes and should not be a talebearer. He should not chase what is not his and not refuse what is obligated on him. He should not be excessively apologetic and should not rejoice at the suffering of others. Sins and disobedience of others should not give him pleasure. He should be focused in his prayers and adopt humility and submission while worshipping. He should

find pleasure in his prayers. His speech should be therapeutic, his patience purely for Allah and his silence contemplation and reflection.

A true believer is one who wants to keep the company of scholars for the sake of acquiring knowledge. He keeps silent to safeguard himself from sins and speaks in order to earn reward. He feels happy after doing good deeds and seeks forgiveness after a mistake. If anyone hurts him, he forgives and resolves issues. If someone mistreats him he responds with wisdom and restraint. He exercises patience in the face of oppression and injustice. He seeks refuge only in Allah. He wants only His help. A believer stays dignified in gatherings, grateful in solitude, content with his provision in this world, full of gratitude in times of ease, self-restrained during trials and tribulations. He remembers Allah when around those who have forgotten Him and when he is in the company of those who remember Him, he seeks Allah's forgiveness instead of deeming himself superior to others. This was actually the greatness of the glorious companions of the Prophet (SAW). They manifested these attributes according to their rank and status. During their time in this world they exhibited this excellence and left this world in the same manner."

On another occasion whilst mentioning the companions of the Holy Prophet (SAW), Hasan Basri said: "The honorable companions were sincere, upright and possessed outstanding dispositions. Their speech matched their actions. Their food and drink was from Halal and pure. They obeyed the commands of Allah with fear and humility. Whatever they gave and whatever they withheld was for the sake of the truth. They gave no consideration to hunger and thirst endured in the path of Allah. Their bodies were weak but their hearts were strong. They never feared the displeasure of people while seeking the pleasure of Allah. They faced injustice with stoicism and never crossed limits when angry. They never rebelled against the

commandments of the Quran, even one bit. Their tongues were busy with the remembrance of Allah at all times. If they were told that Islam needed their help, they were willing to sacrifice their lives for it. They would shower their wealth when approached for material support for Allah's cause. Nothing would stop them from doing good deeds. Their worldly spending was insignificant because very little would be enough for them and they would be content with it."

The outcome of Hasan Basri's reformatory sermons was that people's attention was drawn towards the moral, intellectual and spiritual diseases and trials that arose after the companions departed from this world. When people attended his gatherings and heard Hasan Basri relate the stories of the companions they would feel remorse at their own state of affairs and would start worrying about ways to rectify their mistakes.

Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi in his book, 'Tareekh-e-Daawat o Azeemat' mentions this endeavor in the following words: "He spent a lengthy period of sixty years in preaching religion and reformation. Nobody can even fathom how many people understood true Islam and enhanced their faith during this period." Awam bin Khoshab states that in sixty years Hasan did the work that the prophets (before the end of prophet-hood) would do for their nations.

Death

Hasan Basri had turned eighty-nine and old age had made him weak and feeble. He entrusted his students with his work and went into seclusion so he could spend most of his time in worship. He would refrain from mingling with people and would only come out to attend the obligatory prayers. Gradually, his weakness increased to the extent that he did not even have the strength to go to the mosque.

Instead of getting better, his condition slowly deteriorated to the

point where there was no hope for survival. At this point, he asked for a scribe and made him write, “Hasan testifies that there is only one Allah and that Muhammad (SAW) is His messenger.” On the same day, first of Rajab 110 A.H. on a Thursday, his soul departed from his body. The news of his death immediately spread across the city. Two great experts in Hadith sciences Imam Ayub and Imam Hameed ul Taweel prepared his body for burial. His funeral prayer was held after the Friday prayer at Jamia Masjid in Basra. This is the same mosque where he spent his entire life, first as a student, then a scholar and later as a preacher. There were so many people at the funeral that it seemed the whole of Basra had come out to mourn him. Multitudes followed his funeral to his last destination and it felt as if the city of Basra had emptied out into the graveyard. This was an acknowledgment from the people of the great services of this honorable and virtuous man.

Virtues and Qualities

Imam Hasan was blessed abundantly in terms of inner and outer beauty. His dignified and awe-inspiring personality made him stand out in a crowd. The real reason behind his immense popularity amongst the masses was his coveted character. Khalid bin Safwan narrates that he met Muslimah bin Abdul Malik in Heerah. During their meeting, Muslimah specifically asked him about Hasan Basri, as he was his neighbor and friend. Khalid replied, “He is the kind of person whose inner self is the same as his outer self and his speech matches his actions. In other words, there is no inconsistency or contradiction between his inner and outer self and his speech and action. When he instructs someone to do a good deed, he himself practices it more than anyone else. When he forbids people from an evil action, he himself stays away from it the most. I always found him unconcerned with what people possessed, that is, he had no desire for what they had. However, I saw that the people were all in need of his knowledge and were seekers of the treasure he

had." Muslimah interjected: "Please stop now. This is enough. How can a nation go astray when it has a person like Hasan in its midst?"

This was the reality of Hasan Basri's life. He showed a lack of interest in what people possessed. He did not need people's wealth, respect, fame and praise. He did not encourage people who came to him and expressed their reverence. Once a man visited him and wanted to gift him a bagful of Dinars. At first, he declined politely but when he insisted, Hasan Basri said: "My friend, do you think that these few coins are the reward for a recluse's abstinence? Do you want to give this as a payment for my worship, spiritual labor and teaching? This wealth is a mere deception of this world. When you learn to reject it, you will no more be in need of any guidance. Go and ponder over my words. It will prove beneficial for you."

He always maintained this attitude towards wealth and worldly gains. At one point, the government started a scheme for distributing property amongst the people. His son expressed his desire to take advantage of this opportunity. Hasan Basri said to him: "Be quiet! I wouldn't like a basket full of mud (property) to be in between my two scales (on the Day of Judgment)."

Hasan Basri had an intense dislike for showing off and hypocrisy. He realized that the political rise of the Muslims had led to the formation of a group that had not whole-heartedly accepted Islam. The reason for this was that they did not have the moral courage to disassociate themselves from the Muslims due to the dominance of Islam. Their psychological state, wrongful actions, moral weakness and love for this world was in no way less than that of a disbeliever.

Hasan Basri was highly dejected by the fact that not only were these people among the well-to-do in the society but they were also actively involved in running the affairs of the government. He would say: "Glory be to Allah. What kind of hypocrites

have gained control over this Ummah who are extremely selfish." He would comment on their carefree attitude, "A believer remains the most fearful despite doing his best with people. Even if he spends equivalent to a mountain in charity, he is not content and wonders how he will achieve salvation. The more he progresses in good deeds, the more his fear increases. On the other hand, a hypocrite presumes that the multitude of people who he has gathered with him by giving them worldly favors will seek forgiveness for him when he dies. Therefore, he is forgetful of his deeds and relies merely on his desires and expectations."

People would ask him in amazement if hypocrites were still to be found amongst them. On one such occasion, he said, "If the hypocrites left Basra it would be very difficult for you to entertain yourself in the city." This meant that the environment created by the people who were neglectful of their afterlife held great attraction for the people who followed their desires.

He always stayed away from ostentation. He considered it a branch of hypocrisy and consistently warned people in his sermons about it. Once, one of his followers wanted to accompany him on Hajj. He told him in a straight forward manner: "Kindly excuse me. I have no problem in going with you. However, I want to go alone in front of Allah. Also, when we travel together it is possible that during this long journey we will be exposed to each other's shortcomings. In these conditions, how will it be possible to maintain focus on our worship?"

He preferred solitude during worship and meditation. He disliked revealing the feelings of his heart and his spiritual state. Once, Imam Sha'abee expressed his desire to meet him. Hasan Basri sent back a message saying that he could visit him any time. When he reached Hasan Basri's house, he was told that he was alone inside. Imam Sha'abee asked his companion to come

with him as he did not have the courage to go inside alone. When they both entered, they saw Hasan Basri standing facing the Qibla, lamenting the conditions of human beings and was in a strange trance like state. On seeing this, Imam Sha'abee came back and said, "Right now, the Sheikh is in some other world."

According to Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi, "Hasan Basri was not just a man of words; he was also a man of heart. As far as scholarship was concerned, his whole day would pass by and he would tirelessly answer questions. When his son would request the people not to put excessive burden on him he would say: 'Do not say anything to them; knowledge is the coolness of my eyes.' During his visits to Makkah, learned men that included the likes of Imam Mujahid, Ata bin Abi Rabah and Imam Taoos bin Kaisan would gather around him in order to benefit from his presence. His sermons would be so intense that they would melt people's hearts. Imam Ghazali says that Hasan Basri's style of speech had great similarity to the style of the Prophets. This resemblance was not evident in the sermons of other orators.

Even though the followers of Sufism considered Hasan Basri as their leader, his participation in the expeditions to Kabul, Andkan and Uzbekistan for Jihad confirms that he had a complete perspective of Islam. His way of life held great resemblance to that of the companions of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Once Imam Sha'abee's son asked him why he respected Hasan Basri more than he respected anyone else. Imam Sha'abee answered: "My son! I have seen seventy of the Prophet's companions and I have not seen anyone as similar to them as Hasan Basri."

Fortunate and blessed are those that benefited from the companions of the Prophet (SAW) and met their Creator whilst following their path. Despite the fact that the state of the Muslims had changed after the first generation of the companions, there was still no dearth of people who were

actively spreading the true message of Islam in the manner taught by the companions. They did not indulge in mere rhetoric but sincerely propagated this message with their faith, character and righteous deeds. To this day, this Ummah needs a guide, preacher, reformer and orator like Hasan Basri whose deeds are an affirmation of his sincerity. We need people who do not just gather crowds with their eloquent words, stories of high morals, outstanding views and zealous slogans but are true role models for people to emulate. This is also the demand of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW).

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MUHAMMAD BIN ABDUL WAHAB

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

This booklet is thirteenth in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by my dear friend Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. The book tells us about those unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam. I hope that Muslims today will find these stories a source of inspiration.

This book is about Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab who is one of the greatest reformers that history has seen. This fearless man appeared in the Arabian Peninsula in the 18th century A.D. at a time when the Islamic world was facing one of its darkest times. Innovations in religion, superstitions, grave worship and all kinds of deviations had spread amongst the people. There was severe moral degradation and religion had been reduced to meaningless rituals.

In this dark hour, Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab decided to call people back to the right path; the path shown by the Quran and Sunnah. His mission was to eliminate Shirk (polytheism) from the Islamic world – the most abominable and unforgiveable sin in Islam.

There has always been a lot of false propaganda about his movement. He made an incredible contribution in purging the society of the evils it was involved in.

May Allah reward Naima for her constant encouragement, Sohaib for patiently editing this piece of work and Farooq Saeed, my husband, for his continuous support.

Asma Farooq

Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahab

The 12th century leader who played a religious and political role in reviving Islam in the Arabian peninsula

Introduction

His name was Muhammad and his title was Sheikh ul Islam. His lineage is: Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab bin Sulaiman.

Sheikh's lineage can be traced back to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) from the tribe Ilyas of Banu Tamim. His paternal grandfather was the most learned man in the city of Ainiya and hence was held in great esteem in the whole of Najd. Apart from being a great scholar he was also blessed with bravery, generosity and good character. Since he was a highly respected and non-controversial personality his followers ranged from the common man to the ruling classes. He was consulted whenever there was need for reconciliation or to settle disputes between opponents.

After his death his sons Sheikh Abdul Wahab and Sheikh Ibrahim carried on with his legacy of teaching and scholarly pursuit. In fact, Sheikh Abdul Wahab (Muhammad's father) became so famous that he was given the position of 'Raees ul Ulama' (chief scholar). He was reputed in the fields of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Hadith, Tafseer (interpretation of the Quran), Quran sciences and Arabic literature. His Fatawa (Islamic rulings) were based on the Hanbali school of thought. In addition to the mosque his house would also be occupied with his students. A large gathering which included people from every stratum of society could be seen visiting his house. Even the ruler of Ainiya and his sons would also seek his advice.

Birth

Sheikh Abdul Wahab's son Muhammad was born in 1115 A.H. (1703 A.D.). He was a capable and gifted child whom destiny would guide him to great achievements.

Childhood, Education and Upbringing

The scholarly background and noble character of the household that he was born into left a great impact on Muhammad's personality. From an early age he was distinguished for his intelligence and memory. He was ten when he finished memorizing the Holy Quran. Since there were no Arabic schools in Ainiya, children had to be sent to other cities to acquire education. However, Muhammad did not need to do this as his house was the best centre of learning. He was taught the books of Hanbali school of Fiqh by his father. He studied numerous books of Hadith and Tafseer during his childhood. He would make an extra effort to memorize Ahadith. His father would be very happy with his promising son's intelligence. He used to say that whilst teaching Muhammad he would himself benefit from his son's vast knowledge and intelligence. Despite his young age his father would ask him to lead the prayers. Muhammad got married at a tender age and was only twenty years old when people started to acknowledge him as a scholar.

Start of his Mission

From an early age Muhammad had a great inclination towards enjoining good and forbidding evil. His deep study of Quran and Hadith had made him realize that the society he was living in was by no means conforming to Allah's will. In reality it was built on the foundations of ignorance and had nothing left in it except Shirk, religious innovation and senseless practices. There was turmoil and discord in every sphere of life. He made a firm resolve to rectify the situation. He would raise his voice whenever he would see anything being done against the rules of

Islamic Shariah (Islamic law). When he approached various scholars in this regard, only a few would reluctantly give him their support. The majority of the scholars opposed him relentlessly and created uproar against his efforts. Apart from his family and a few followers the whole city stood against him. In the face of this opposition his father decided to move from Ainiya. Thus in 1139 A.H. accompanied by his family and followers his father left for Harimela.

Muhammad was totally against this migration. He did not accompany his father and singlehandedly continued the task of calling people to the truth in Ainiya. The scholars, rulers and the common public could not silence him. Muhammad who was around 24 or 25 years old at that time would walk through the streets and markets with a handful of followers and call people towards Tawheed (monotheism). He would be surrounded by a massive crowd who would taunt, slander and throw accusations at him and eventually resort to abusive language. This state of affairs continued till Muhammad was convinced that his efforts were fruitless and it was time to move on. He made an intention to go to the holy cities of Makkah and Madina for the performance of Hajj and at the same time seek the advice of the scholars over there and acquire further knowledge in their company.

Journey of Hajj and Learning in Hejaz

In Makkah he met local scholars as well as scholars from all over the world who were visiting Makkah for the purpose of Hajj. He presented the basic objectives of his mission to the respected scholars who after some discussions gave him a positive response and appreciated his work. This encouragement and the firm belief that he was on the right path made him even more determined.

After performing Hajj, Muhammad came to Madina where he started attending the study circles of the esteemed scholar

Abdullah bin Ibrahim bin Saif. During their meeting he informed Sheikh Ibne Saif about his mission and all what he had gone through. Sheikh was very pleased and took him to meet Sheikh Muhammad Hayat Sindhi who was a highly respected scholar of Hadith and Sunnah in Madina. At this point in time, news of his mission had reached many scholars who offered their support to remove religious innovations and senseless practices from the society.

During this whole period, Muhammad continued to benefit from the company of scholars. He mastered the field of Hadith and received certification from his teachers. In addition, he was also given permission to teach the books of the Hanbali school of thought.

During his stay in Hejaz, Sheikh Muhammad realized that even though these two cities were a reflection of true Islamic spirit, yet people in their surrounding areas were engaged in acts that were in total violation of the Islamic Shariah. Once whilst standing in front of the Prophet's grave he observed a crowd of people supplicating facing the Holy Prophet's (SAW) grave. He could not restrain himself when he saw people behaving in this ignorant manner. He explained to them in detail the correct manner of visiting the holy grave and its importance in Shariah. In the meantime his teacher Allama Sindhi arrived over there. He apprised the esteemed scholar of the situation and enquired his opinion regarding these practices. In answer to his query Allama Sindhi recited the following verse of the Holy Quran:

"Verily what these people are following is going to be destroyed. And all that they are doing is in vain" (7:139)

There was never an oversight on his part in fulfilling the mission he had undertaken of enjoining good and forbidding evil. To the extent that he fulfilled this duty in front of the Prophet's grave even in the presence of his teacher. On his departure from Madina he addressed his teachers, friends and

supporters and once again reiterated his resolve to take every possible action against polytheism and religious innovations. Everyone prayed for the success of his mission and he embarked upon his journey.

Conditions During his Time

Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab was a contemporary of Shah Waliullah Dehlavi. Let us briefly take a look at the conditions prevailing in Arabia at that time specifically in the area of Najd.

In the 12th century Arabia like other Muslim countries came under the control of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans had given internal independence to all the states under their control. The prevailing political and religious condition of each state was taken into account before choosing a representative from the local people to represent the Ottomans. The Turks who had great respect and regard for the Arabs, would try their best not to interfere in the internal matters of Hejaz and Najd. In Hejaz (Makkah, Madina and its neighboring areas) the representative of the Ottomans was known as 'Ameer-e-Hejaz' or 'Sharif-e-Makkah' and was from the descendants of the Holy Prophet (SAW). There were constants feuds within the Sharif family for this coveted position but the Ottomans would choose to ignore these matters.

These conditions were not just confined to Hejaz but were prevalent in the adjoining area of Najd too. There were no geographical boundaries marked out in these areas. The areas of the city of Al Ariz and Al Qaseem held great importance. Sheikh's place of birth Ainiya and the center of his mission, Dariya, were located in Al Ariz (whose famous city Riyadh is still the Saudi capital). This area was considered the heart of Najd. However, the absence of political unity and the division of the area into many small states led to constant fighting over power among the tribes which resulted in civil war. There was

complete political chaos in the entire area of Najd.

In the 12th century Najd had become a centre of misguidance and unislamic practices. People had deviated from the basic teachings of Islam like Tawheed and from the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to the extent that all kinds of pre Islamic practices had become a way of life. It was as if Islam had become a combination of Shirk, idolatry, religious innovation and senseless practices and traditions. Basic beliefs had changed; the practices that Islam had come to abolish had become the very foundations of the religion practiced there. People would pray to trees, rocks and graves and sacrifice animals in their name. The graves of the companions of the Prophet Zayd bin Khattab (RA) and Zarar bin Azor (RA) had become an exhibition ground for religious innovations.

There was a famous date tree by the name of 'Fahhal' in the town of AlFada. Men and women would travel great distances to pay homage and worship this tree. They would prostrate in front of it and relate their needs and wishes to it. Special prayers would be made to cure sickness and for the attainment of marriage proposals. Women would pray to it to grant them a child. The branches of the tree were not visible because they were covered with ropes and strings, each signifying the wishes of the people.

Similarly, there was a cave in the hills of Dariya which pilgrims would throng. It was claimed that this was the grave of a girl named Bintul Ameer. People would circumambulate (Tawaf) around it and pray to it. The story behind this was that one day the girl was passing by this hill when she was harassed by a group of wicked young men. She prayed with such earnest that a stone split open to give her refuge. On this basis people believed that even after her death this extraordinary girl had powers to ward off evil.

In the area of Kharj a saint's grave was the centre of peoples'

attention. The legend had it that the saint despite being blind would travel alone to faraway places. Even though he was very wealthy no one would rob him and no wild animal would harm him. After he passed away his grave became a place of veneration where people would engage in worship and present offerings.

This state of affairs was not confined to these areas but most parts of Najd were famous for a particular grave, shrine or mosque where polytheistic practices were rampant. Good and bad omens were taken from the flight of birds. For every little matter fortune tellers were consulted to find out what the future held. The followers of the famous Najdian oracle Ablaq Saadi belonging to the pre Islamic era had spread everywhere. They wanted to lead their lives according to their own will and be free from the constraints of Islam.

The social and political conditions of the people were as alarming as their religious affairs. Due to the absence of a central power, every city had become a separate unit. There was no communication between the towns and cities. Rulers were chosen on the basis of tribal affiliations and lineage. They would make decisions based on bias and prejudice instead of justice and fairness. The rich and powerful would use every tactic to defeat and humiliate the weak. Looting, unjustified killing and rape had become an everyday occurrence.

In these circumstances the criminal elements of society had full liberty to carry on their activities. People travelling through the forests of Najd were not safe as bands of robbers would hide in the clumps of trees and in caves and loot the trade convoys. Robberies and looting also occurred in broad daylight as there was no one to stop them. The absence of rule of law led to chaos and civil war everywhere. Consequently, peace and tranquility of the whole society was ruined.

The social customs of the people had become similar to those of

the days of ignorance. There was a trend towards leading an animalistic way of life. In their free time people would sit in groups and relate tales, discuss current affairs and war stories. The educational institutions were practically nonexistent and mosques were deserted. There was no interest in acquiring knowledge. Turkish had replaced Arabic in the offices. It is not surprising that the morals of the people become depraved in such abominable conditions. Basic social and moral values that were given importance even in the days of ignorance had become redundant.

Daily occurrences of highway robberies and dacoities had devastated the economy. Import and export trade had come to a halt. The country was incapable of producing any grains itself. Unlawful occupation of the agricultural lands had demoralized the farmers to the extent that deeming their farming income insufficient, they joined the thieves and robbers. There was widespread famine in the country. Driven by hunger, the distressed public also resorted to unlawful ways to obtain food for themselves.

Masood Alam Nadwi in his famous book on Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab quotes an American writer Staddard who despite being a non-Muslim expresses his surprise and sorrow at the state of affairs in Arabia at that time. He says that “not only did they disregard the teachings of the Quran but also went against them – to the extent that even the two holy places (Makkah and Madina) became the centre of evil doings and Hajj which the Prophet (SAW) had declared obligatory had become debased because of the religious innovations. Essentially, Islam had perished. If Muhammad (SAW) returned to this world he would express his disgust at the way his followers had abandoned their faith and adopted idolatry”.

A New Start to his Mission and its Opposition

On his return from Hajj, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab went to

Najd and then onwards to Basra. Here, he developed strong ties with Sheikh Muhammad Al Majmuee. In Basra things were no different to Najd. Polytheism had become deeply entrenched in their lives. Heedless of the consequences, Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab continued to preach people to refrain from indulging in these polytheistic practices. His endeavor was not well received and he began to face opposition. When he did not give up his cause, his enemies confiscated his books and belongings, beat him up and threw him out of the city.

Whilst travelling between Basra and the city of Zubair, Sheikh Muhammad Abdul Wahab fainted due to the intense summer heat. When he gained consciousness he was listless with hunger and thirst. Whilst he was praying to Allah to ease his difficulty he saw a man coming from the city of Zubair ,who on seeing his state gave him water and took him home.

After resting for a few days over there he decided to travel to Syria. However, when he realized he had no means to undertake this journey he left for the city of Harimela where his father lived. There are two views regarding his father's reaction to his call during this time. The first is that he was an avid supporter of his ideology and remained so till the end. The other view is that his father stayed detached from his mission. Sheikh always kept the respect he held for his father in mind and even though his movement continued in Harimela, its pace remained slow.

One way to synthesize the above two viewpoints is that even though Sheikh's father agreed with his beliefs and philosophy, it was against his scholarly status and respect in society to have an open confrontation with anyone. Regardless of the situation, Sheikh was not the sort to stop calling people to what he believed was the truth. Consequently, in Harimela also his rival scholars and their followers became his worst enemies. However, they did not take any action against him out of respect for his father. After his father's death in 1153 A.H.

Sheikh's mission gained strength and he managed to influence a large number of young people in becoming acquainted with the message of Tawheed. On the other hand his opponents now had full freedom as his father was not alive to protect him anymore. Their persecutions against Sheikh Muhammad and his mission gained speed.

In Harimela two tribes belonging to the descendants of Raba'a had seized power at the same time. There was extreme hostility between the tribes and clashes were customary. Both the tribes supported criminals to fight against each other and no one was safe from their evil doings. When Sheikh raised his voice against them, they decided that killing him was the only solution. A few criminals tried to enter his house at night and hid in the shadow of the wall. At the same time a caravan was entering the city. When they saw the criminals they assumed that they were robbers and created a commotion. The criminals had no choice but to run away.

It was not long before Sheikh found out the whole truth. It was not safe for him to stay in Harimela anymore. Even after enduring all kinds of harassment and persecution, this embodiment of patience and determination was not willing to budge an inch from his mission. Once again he left Harimela for the sake of Allah and decided to go to Ainiya. After some correspondence with the ruler Sheikh realized that he was impressed with his mission and was willing to let him stay in Ainiya.

Migration to Ainiya and Change in Strategy

Sheikh had come to the conclusion that preaching pure Tawheed (monotheism) in a polytheistic society and reforming their centuries old moral degradation was not going to be an easy task. Sheikh was willing to endure all kinds of difficulties on his own self, but he recognized that for any movement to grow conditions have to be favorable at least to the extent that

its very existence is not threatened. If the government or ruling party is supportive, the objectives can be achieved easily and quickly. Therefore, after finding support in the ruler of Ainiya Usman bin Muammar, Sheikh decided to move there in order to focus completely on his mission.

On his arrival Sheikh was given a warm welcome by the ruler of Ainiya. After presenting his mission and clarifying the objectives, Sheikh asked him for his support. He said to Usman: "If you are willing to support La ilaha illallah, then come and join us. I am hopeful that Allah will make you victorious and you will gain control over Najd and its people". Usman assured him of his support and arranged his marriage to his niece.

Once again Sheikh started his Dawah work with renewed fervor. Allah opened up the hearts of the residents of Ainiya for the truth and Sheikh made considerable progress in his mission. After verbal preaching he decided that now the time had come to take some practical measures to demolish the centers of religious innovation. The first thing he did was to burn down the trees that had gained sanctity in the hearts of the people. Sheikh invited the people on a specific day to witness the end of the tree that was deeply revered by them. At the prescribed time Sheikh came out himself and read the following verse of the Quran which the Prophet (SAW) had recited when he had demolished the idols in the Kaaba: "Truth has arrived and falsehood has perished; for falsehood is bound to perish." (17:81). Sheikh followed the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) and pulled out the tree from its roots. The general public waited to see what punishment would descend upon him in recompense for this great crime. However, when they saw that Sheikh and his followers remained unharmed, the spell of their blind faith got broken.

Zayd bin Khattab (RA), a companion of the Prophet (SAW) and brother of Hazrat Umar (RA) had been martyred in the battle of

Yamama. It was believed that his grave was in a place called Jabeela. Large numbers of people would visit the grave. They would consider it a source of blessing to rub their bodies against the grave and then sit for 'Aitekaf' (sitting in seclusion for the purpose of worship) in the same place. When Sheikh decided to demolish the grave, his followers and even Usman, the ruler of Ainiya, were hesitant. However, Sheikh had made up his mind. Ibne Bashar relates this incident. Sheikh addressed Usman in the following words: "Come, let's demolish this dome whose foundation is laid on falsehood and because of which people have strayed from the right path". Usman asked him to destroy it himself. Sheikh replied: "We face a threat from the people of Jabeela. They might attack us. Without your presence I cannot demolish it."

Usman agreed and marched towards the grave with 600 soldiers. The people of Jabeela had full intention of using force to stop them but when they saw Usman's preparation they yielded to him. Now Usman said to the Sheikh: "We cannot touch the dome". Sheikh himself took a hammer and leveled the dome to the ground. That night the ignorant people waited impatiently to see what affliction would descend upon the Sheikh after his unlawful action. The fact is that none can harm who Allah protects. The next day people were disappointed that nothing happened. However, this event renewed the faith of the weak and bolstered the courage of the righteous.

The recurrence of these incidents opened up people's eyes and they started believing in the Sheikh. The movement gained strength. People would travel from faraway places to meet the Sheikh and express interest in gaining knowledge. Usman assisted in providing food and lodging for the travelers and also fixed stipends for them. Sheikh urged Usman to revive the practice of congregational prayers. This was implemented to the extent that punishment was suggested for people not attending the prayers. Government officials were extorting all kinds of

taxes from the people. Sheikh abolished all illegal taxes and only allowed the collection of Zakah.

Expulsion from Ainiya and Attempted Murder

Sheikh was busy with his mission when an incident occurred that once again changed the tide of things. Masood Alam Nadvi relates this incident in the following words: “Some things are just meant to happen. A woman guilty of adultery came to the Sheikh and confessed her sin. After repeated cross questioning she would not budge from her confession. Sheikh was left with no choice but to order her stoning. Usman together with a group of Muslims carried out the punishment. The first person whose hand moved to pick up a stone was Usman”.

This incident created quite a stir. How could people who were accustomed to sin and were involved in it day and night tolerate this? They immediately went to the ruler of Ahsa and informed him of the whole situation. The ruler was a very powerful man and held great pride in his authority. Since he was an immoral man the news of this incident angered him immensely. He wrote a letter to Usman (whose gardens were in Ahsa) warning him that either he should himself kill the Sheikh or force him to leave Ainiya and send him to Ahsa. He threatened that whatever Usman was getting from Ahsa would be stopped.”

There are two views regarding the reaction from the ruler of Ainiya. According to one, when Sheikh saw that Usman did not have the power to fight the ruler of Ahsa he decided to leave the city. The other view states that Usman himself sent a message to the Sheikh to leave the city. After receiving this message Sheikh left the city and whilst travelling in the intense heat of the Arabian desert recited the following verse of the Quran: “And whoever fears Allah He will make for him a way out and will provide for him from where he does not expect.” (65:2)

According to a tradition Usman ordered a soldier to follow the

Sheikh and later kill him. However, when he decided to kill him, he was overcome with such fear that he was unable to do so and had to run back to Ainiya.

Support from Ibne Saud and Sheikh's Popularity

After expulsion from Ainiya the Sheikh made a move towards Dariya. Mohammad bin Saud, the ruler of Dariya was a pious man and was known for his virtuous character. In Dariya Sheikh stayed at the house of Abdullah bin Swailam. Even though Abdullah was terrified, he was forced into giving refuge to the Sheikh because of the Arab tradition of hospitality. He was aware of the fate of the people who had protected the Sheikh in other places. As soon as news spread that Sheikh was in town, crowds of people gathered outside his house. Abdullah was scared that this news would soon reach the ruler of Dariya. Meanwhile, Sheikh started teaching the explanation of the Holy Quran and giving sermons. Some of his students mentioned about his arrival to Muhammad bin Saud's brother Sanyan and his wife Mawdha who was well known for her kindness, generosity and patronage of Islam. Mawdha was impressed by the Sheikh's knowledge and virtue. She informed her husband, the ruler of Dariya, of the situation and said "Allah has sent this great blessing for you. Go and support him. Your affairs in this world and the hereafter will be set right if you do so".

Muhammad bin Saud trusted his virtuous wife and taking her advice decided to meet the Sheikh. In this meeting Sheikh Muhammad gave a short speech on the important aspects of his mission, namely Tawheed, enjoining good and forbidding evil and Jihad. Muhammad bin Saud was very impressed by the Sheikh's sincerity and the simplicity of his mission. He said "O Sheikh! Without doubt this is the religion of Allah and his Prophet (SAW). I am ready to assist you, follow you and wage war against those who oppose Tawheed. But I have two conditions: One, if we help you and Allah gives us victory, you

will not leave us. Two, you will not stop me from receiving a fixed tax from the people of Dariya at the time of harvest."

Sheikh replied instantly: "I accept the first condition. Bring your hand. From now on, your blood is my blood and attacking your honor is like attacking mine. As for the second condition, InshaAllah you will gain so much from your victories and war booty that even the thought of this tax will not come to your mind".

In 1157 A.H. Ibne Saud took the oath of allegiance to the Sheikh. He resolved to enjoin good and forbid evil and to follow the path prescribed by the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW).

Dariya was a small town in which majority of the population was illiterate. As soon as Ibne Saud swore allegiance to the Sheikh, people who were hesitant until now started showing up in great numbers to show their support to the Sheikh. People started studying the Quran; Sheikh would himself teach the holy book and Sunnah to the seekers of knowledge from morning to evening. Sheikh had left behind groups of his followers in every area he went. They were happy to hear that the mission had secured a base camp and started growing. One by one everyone started heading towards Dariya. Everything changed completely in Dariya. In a place where ignorance had spread far and wide, people started calling each other towards Allah and His prophet (SAW). Mosques started filling up and people started attending intellectual gatherings. The ruler of Ainiya, Usman, also came to the Sheikh and after pledging allegiance to him vowed to implement the laws of Shariah. The people of Harimela also took an oath of allegiance and thus Dawah work started with great zeal and fervor.

Key Points of Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab's Call

Sheikh's mission was based on pure Tawheed and complete

adherence to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The movement was started for the revival of these and Sheikh managed to achieve his desired success. We should look at and understand the mission's key points in view of the religious and moral conditions of Najd and its surrounding areas.

1. Return to Pure Tawheed and its Pre-requisites

The main objective of the movement was the implementation of pure Tawheed in everyday life. The meaning of pure Tawheed is worshipping only one Allah without associating any partners with him. It is not permissible to pray to deities or ask them for help or seek their intercession. Similarly, it is against the Shariah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to exaggerate the status of pious men, turn their graves into places of worship or believe that their intercession (and not one's good deeds) will save one on the Day of Judgment.

2. Visiting Graves

Sheikh taught people the correct manners of visiting graves. He made it clear that it is allowed, even desirable, in Islam to visit graves. However, a person visiting graves must remind himself that this world is temporary and just like everything perishes, he will also have to die and leave everything behind in this temporary abode. He should seek forgiveness from Allah for himself and the grave dwellers and then salutation should be sent to them according to the way the Prophet has taught us.

Making graves a place of carnival, building mosques on graves, kissing them, praying to the grave dwellers, circumambulating them, worshipping them, crying and screaming around them are all forbidden acts. Also, requesting the grave dwellers to remove difficulties, considering them benefactors who can fulfill our needs and wishes, sacrificing animals in their name and considering it an obligatory act like Hajj to circumambulate their graves are all acts of Shirk.

3. Tawassul-bil-Anbiya

Before clarifying the reality of Tawassul-bil-Anbiya, it is important to understand its meaning**.** The word Tawassul means to use a Waseelah (mediation) to reach or achieve something. The word Tawassul is used in three different ways:

I. Seeking Waseelah or mediation through obedience of the Prophet (SAW). This is obligatory and without it our faith is incomplete.

II. Using the Prophet's Waseelah in our supplications. This was possible only during the life of the Prophet (SAW) but after his departure from this world it is prohibited. However, it is possible to use the Waseelah of any living righteous man. During his caliphate Hazrat Umar (RA) whilst collectively supplicating for rain would state that "When we suffered from drought during the life of the Holy Prophet we would use his Waseelah and Allah would bless us with rain. Now after his death we take the Waseelah of his uncle Abbas (RA)". We learn from this that we are not allowed to make any deceased person, even prophets, a Waseelah in our supplications.

III. The third Tawassul is when a person asks Allah to grant his supplications by repeatedly using the Waseelah of prophets and righteous people. There is no evidence of this in the Quran, Hadith or in the lives of the companions of the Holy Prophet. This is considered an act of Shirk which is totally prohibited in Islam. It was this Tawassul that was commonly practiced in the time of the Sheikh. He vehemently opposed this practice and appealed to the people to refrain from this act.

4. The Issue of Intercession (Shafa'at)

Intercession has always been a controversial issue. According to Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab intercession was a plea for forgiveness of one's sins. He believed firmly in the

intercession to be offered by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) on the Day of Judgment. However, in the light of clear verses of the Quran, his view was that no one will be able to intercede or place a recommendation without the permission of Allah. This is made clear in the following verse of the Quran: “Who is he that can intercede with him except with His permission?” (2:255). This means that the Prophet (SAW) will not be able to intercede without the permission of Allah and will be able to intercede only for the person for whom Allah gives permission.

According to authentic Ahadith, in addition to prophets and angels, righteous people will also be able to intercede with Allah’s permission. However, it is not permissible to call upon any prophet, martyr, saint or angel for intercession using, for example, the following words: “O Muhammad, intercede for me” or “O Ali (RA) only you are my intercessor” or “O the virtuous, get my sins absolved”. Also, it is not right to be convinced of intercession to such an extent that one stops doing good deeds.

A person desirous of the Prophet’s intercession should pray to Allah in the following words: “O Allah, accept your messenger Muhammad’s (SAW) intercession in my favor.”

5. To Take Oath in the Name of Anyone Besides Allah

In Sheikh’s opinion it was against the essence of Tawheed to take an oath in anyone’s name besides Allah. In those days this was a common practice among the Muslims. However, it is clearly stated in a Hadith in Jami Tirmidhi (one of the six authentic books of Ahadith) that taking an oath in the name of anyone besides Allah is considered Shirk. An oath is invalid if not taken in the name of Allah and therefore there is no expiation for it. This is strictly forbidden because by doing so we are honoring others besides Allah.

6. Attributes of Allah and Sheikh’s Stance

There has always been a difference of opinion among the scholars regarding the interpretation of the attributes of Allah mentioned in the Holy Quran. One group totally denied the attributes of the Creator because of their likeness to His creation while the other tried to explain the attributes. For example, they explained that 'Yadullah' (Allah's hand) refers to Allah's generosity and power.

Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab supported the belief of early Islamic era and classical scholars in this matter. Their view was that we should believe in the attributes of Allah in exactly the way that they have been stated in the Quran and accept them without any doubts. It is incorrect to try to interpret their exact meaning or nature or give explanations or try to probe beyond the literal meaning. Only Allah has knowledge of the real meaning and interpretation and it is the duty of a Muslim to have faith in Allah's attributes and His being without any objections.

7. Ijtihad

The Sheikh's view on Ijtihad (religious interpretation by a scholar in the light of Quran and Sunnah) is very clear. As far as beliefs and action were concerned he followed the Quran and Sunnah and the Salafi school of thought. Whereas in matters of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) he generally followed Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal but if he found an authentic Hadith in contradiction to the view of Hanbali school of thought he would never give preference to anyone's view over the Hadith.

He was greatly influenced by Imam Ibne Taymiyyah and Imam Ibne Qayyim and would base his arguments on their sayings. However, he did not bind himself by blindly following them either.

Sheikh also considered it permissible to follow different scholars and their schools of thought. However, he did not

approve of prejudice and rigidity in supporting one's Imam after the clear manifestation of the truth (i-e by way of a Quranic verse or a clear-cut authentic Hadith).

Popularity of the Mission and Declaration of War Against the Movement

The supporters of the movement spread Sheikh's message across Najd, Ahsaa, Basra and all the neighboring areas. The rulers of Riyadh, Ahsaa and Qateef considered this as a warning bell for themselves. The objectives of Sheikh's message were to free human beings from the oppression of other human beings and conform to Allah's commandments. After sensing this impending danger to their power, the rulers started persecuting Sheikh's followers. The ruler of Riyadh, Daham bin Dawas, was a cruel and ruthless man. His people were helpless under his injustices. He sought pleasure in torturing and oppressing the noble and the pious. When the persecution became intolerable, Sheikh was forced to take retaliatory measures. Mohammad bin Saud, his sons and brothers thrashed the enemy with their armed forces. The armed conflict continued for a long time.

Abdul Aziz, who came to power after the death of Mohammad bin Saud, continued to fight against the enemy. For around 25 to 30 years skirmishes continued with the ruler of Riyadh. In 1187 A.H. Daham fled from Riyadh after which Sheikh and his followers took control of the area. Despite the fact that the influence of Aal-e-Saud (descendants of Saud) kept increasing in Najd and the neighboring areas, they continued to face vehement opposition. Initially the people of Najd did not even get permission to perform Hajj and relations with the ruler of Makkah remained tense. They reached a truce for sometime but this did not last long and after Sheikh's death the situation became worse. Details of this will be mentioned later.

Formation of an Islamic State

During this entire period, first Muhammad bin Saud and then his successor Abdul Aziz Muhammad bin Saud strove to establish an Islamic system of governance under the Sheikh's guidance. Sheikh would also settle all disputes as he was the chief advisor and judge to Ibne Saud. Even though he was completely occupied in Dawah work, he would continually provide guidance to help run the government according to Islamic guidelines. The family of Saud wouldn't take any step without the Sheikh's approval and consultation. Letters to rulers and nobility would be written in light of his instructions.

The foundations of the Islamic system of governance that Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab and Muhammad bin Saud formulated were based on the following guidelines:

- To call people to Allah and to implement pure Tawheed in a way that its effects would be evident in every sphere of life.
- Necessary steps should be taken by the state to ensure that the obligation of establishing prayer is fulfilled.
- Efforts should be made at a state level to fulfill the obligation of enjoining good and forbidding evil.

What is Islamic governance and what are the principles that it should be based on is a lengthy discussion. In short we can say that there is no difference of opinion on these basic principles. However, the methodology of implementation is very important as the noblest of causes can end in failure due to ineffective planning and wrong strategy. This rule applies even to a commendable act like establishing an Islamic state.

Sheikh's Educational Activities

Abdul Aziz Muhammad bin Saud stayed loyal to the Sheikh just

like his predecessor Muhammad bin Saud. The political front was taken care of by Abdul Aziz whilst the Sheikh continued to fulfill the responsibility of guiding the state while focusing on the religious and scholarly front to produce the required manpower. When the Sheikh successfully laid the foundation of an Islamic state and its guiding principles were seen to be implemented practically as well, he reserved himself for teaching only and handed over all other affairs to Abdul Aziz. Prior to this Sheikh had already trained hundreds of men who had spread in all areas to propagate the message of Islam and were also fully capable of running the state according to Islamic principles.

Death

Sheikh had now turned 90 years and needed to rest. The intellectual and physical struggle that he embarked upon when he was twenty years old kept him busy for the next seventy years. He fell ill in 1206 A.H. and in the month of Ziqad in 1792 A.D. he left this world for his eternal abode. The news of his death saddened his people. The sun of knowledge and action had set, but the Arabian Peninsula was shining with the light of Tawheed.

Sheikh was blessed with a long life and he put it to great use. The level of opposition and failure that he faced in his early life was compensated by Allah with the same level of success in his later years. There are not many people who gain as much popularity in their life as the Sheikh did. In addition to his own children, the term Aal-e-Sheikh (children of Sheikh) is also used to refer to his students who carried his work forward and kept his mission alive.

Effects of his Movement

The uniqueness of Sheikh's mission is the huge scale on which he prepared and trained people. The effects of his message can

be felt to this day in all the places where his students and supporters set foot. In all Muslim countries (which include Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sumatra, Nigeria and African countries) a large part of society has been influenced by Sheikh's message. In India, the roots of Syed Ahmed Shaheed's movement which initiated Jihad against the Sikhs, the Marhattas and the British can also be traced back to Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab's movement.

After Sheikh's demise the family of Saud continued to achieve great success on the Dawah front but at the same time they faced severe opposition from the neighboring areas. Relations became strained and tense after the ruler of Makkah refused entry to Hajj pilgrims from Najd. In 1208 A.H. after the failure of numerous attempts at reconciliation, the commanders of Saud army marched victoriously into Makkah. They imposed restrictions on all kinds of polytheistic practices and reforms were put into place.

The Najdian rule stretched in the north from Halb to the Indian Ocean and in the east from the Persian Gulf and Iraq to Bahr e Qulzum. The Turkish Caliph Bab Aali sensed danger from the growing power of Aal-e Saud and appointed the ruler of Egypt Mohammad Ali Pasha to annihilate the people of Najd.

The Egyptian forces were continuously in conflict with Aal-e-Saud and finally in 1233 A.H. Ibrahim Pasha, the son of the Egypt ruler, attacked Dariya with a huge army. Dariya was conquered after a siege of six months and with this came the end of the first period of Aal-e-Saud's rule. The Saudi ruler (Abdullah bin Saud bin Abdul Aziz bin Mohammad bin Saud) and his men were arrested and first taken to Egypt where they were subjected to severe persecution. They were then sent to Turkey. The Saudi ruler along with his men was hanged in 1818 in the courtyard of Hagia Sophia. After ruling for three quarters of century power slipped out of the hands of the Saudis.

Since the effects of the mission were not only political but moral and spiritual as well, there was no decline in its popularity and Aal-e- Saud started rising up again. Finally, after a struggle of around 100 years, the exiled Saudi prince Abdul Aziz bin Abdur Rahman succeeded in defeating Aal-e-Rasheed. By 1913 most part of eastern Arabia was conquered and in 1933 the whole of Hejaz and Najd was under their control. The region of Hejaz and Najd was renamed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

To this day, Sheikh's teachings are in practice in Saudi Arabia. This is experienced by every person who travels there with the intention of Hajj or Umrah. The excellent results achieved by the Saudi government as a result of following Sheikh's guidance are evident to everyone. The exemplary establishment of prayer is one such reward. A point to be noted here is that establishing prayer, enjoining good and forbidding evil are not the only things that are essential in an Islamic state. Other basic requirements are provision of justice for all, freedom of expression and a simple lifestyle of the ruling class. One cannot claim to have established an Islamic state by disregarding any of the above requirements. The Saudi government should pay due attention to this aspect as well.

We know that the rightly guided caliphs would include the society's noblest people in their consultations. The system was neither dictatorship nor today's democracy. The wise and honorable people of the society were considered capable of running the affairs of the state on the right principles. Justice prevailed to the extent that the ruling class was answerable in their matters more than the common people. A golden example is that of caliph Umar (RA) who was even questioned about the garments covering his body, at a time when he was ruling the ever expanding Muslim empire. Another shining example is when caliph Ali (RA) presented himself in a court with his opponent and he ended up losing the case.

Freedom of expression is every individual's basic birthright and forcing every individual to conform to the views of the government in everything is not in line with the spirit of Islam. An ordinary woman advised caliph Umar (RA) during law-making by reminding him of a verse of the Holy Quran. After realizing that there was weight in what she was saying, he accepted and appreciated her advice. On the other hand, the affairs of Muslim states are in front of everyone. They do not even come up to the contemporary western standards – let alone the superior standards set by Islam.

Any government that claims to be an Islamic one must ensure that its ruling class leads a simple life conforming to the laws and spirit of Shariah. Contrary to this it is not becoming for the descendants of Sheikh or Saud to lead a life of indulgence in luxurious palaces, to travel in expensive cars with armies of servants making way for them and be followed by cars and motorcycles with blaring hooters and sirens, to have intoxicated gait, drunken eyes and long cloaks (a sign of pride). It is incumbent upon those who want to adopt and implement the Shariah brought by Allah's messenger to reform themselves and change their behavior.

Objections

Even though Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab's movement received an incredible level of support and recognition, it is also a movement in the Islamic world that both Muslims and non-Muslims have tried to discredit in every possible way. The uproar created by the British, Turks and Egyptians made it seem as if this was a different religion from Islam. We will now mention some of the objections that were raised against the movement from time to time.

1. Wahabism…a Sect or a Different Religion?

The movement that reverted people back to the pure teachings

of Islam was given the name of 'Wahabism' and the word 'Wahabi' started being used as a curse. An important point is that the founder of the movement was Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab, and if the origins of the movement are to be traced back to him then the movement should have been called the 'Muhammadi Movement'. However, such a name would not cause any defamation to the movement. Therefore, the name was attributed to Sheikh's father Abdul Wahab and the term 'Wahabi' was popularized. To this day, Sheikh's followers are known by this name. As such, Wahab is one of the names of Allah and no one can have any objection in being associated with this name. However, Wahabism was made popular in a way that it appeared as a religion that was different from Islam. Regardless of the source of this malicious slander, the fact is that the British capitalized on the situation and vilified this name for their vested interests.

2. Denial of Sunnah

One of the things said against Sheikh and his teachings was that they were against the Sunnah (teachings of the Prophet). In addition to rejecting Hadith he was also accused of being an enemy of the Prophet and his family (Ahl e Bayt), and that he forbade the sending of salutation on the Prophet (SAW). Masood Alam Nadvi expresses his surprise at this allegation in the following words: "The peculiarity of the world is worth seeing. A person whose every action in life is dictated by the Sunnah of the Prophet is accused of denouncing Hadith."

We answer this accusation from one of Sheikh's writings:

"Tell my adversaries that it is incumbent upon everyone to lead their lives according to the legacy of the Prophet (SAW). I tell you that my books are with you; study them. Do not follow what I say. However, you should obey the Prophet's commandments which are present in your books too. Is it correct to call someone a Muslim if he holds animosity towards

the Prophet (SAW) who gifted us with the guidance of the true religion?"

What the Sheikh forbade people from was showing excessive devotion to prophets and righteous people that could lead them to Shirk (polytheism). As we know, Shirk is no ordinary sin. It can lead a person into hellfire and expulsion from the fold of Islam.

3. Derogatory Attitude Towards Other Muslims

Another allegation against the Sheikh was that he considered everyone an infidel except his followers and himself. It was believed that he was of the view that whoever did not obey him was out of the fold of Islam and that it was permissible to take his life and property.

It is not enough to say that this is a mere allegation. The truth regarding this matter is that according to the Sheikh if a person does not leave polytheistic practices and grave worship after accepting Islam then he is a Mushrik (polytheist). His logic was that even in the days of ignorance people considered Allah to be the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. However, they would include partners in their invocations, Tawaf (circumambulation around the Kaaba) and sacrifice. Therefore, by using the terms Waseelah (intercession) and Shafa'at (mediation) we cannot change the truth regarding Kufr (disbelief).

Despite the fact that the Sheikh considered all these practices as Shirk, he considered it obligatory to first educate those with such beliefs before declaring them infidels. However, if anyone persisted in his polytheistic beliefs or practices after the clear manifestation of the truth, then the Sheikh would consider him an infidel. He never initiated any attack on these people. However, when conflict was imposed upon him he reciprocated by fighting the enemy. It is very clear that the Sheikh did not generalize in censuring the Muslims of the world, a fact which

he stated repeatedly. However, what can one do if someone wants to lay accusations out of sheer obstinacy?

It is also said that he considered it permissible to wage war against those who renounced Salah (prayer). The truth is that it is a much publicized issue from the Hanbali school of thought and this remains the practice of the Hanbalis. Since Sheikh and the people of Najd followed the Hanbali school of thought in most issues, according to them a person who forsakes prayer is a Kafir (infidel).

4. Demolition of Graves

Sheikh and his followers demolished the shrines and graves that were revered and worshipped by the people. The reason was that building concrete graves or grand shrines on them is prohibited in Islam as these practices open the doors to Shirk (polytheism). This was the basis of Sheikh's decision of ordering the demolition. However, he considered it an approved and recommended act to visit the holy grave of the Prophet (SAW).

5. Extremism in Religion

Sheikh ul Islam and his disciples are accused of being rigid and extreme in their teachings of Islam. Although the Sheikh repeatedly instructed his students and supporters not to be rigid as it leads to dissension which is disapproved in Islam, no one can deny the fact that some of his disciples were rigid and a demonstration of this can be seen in the present Saudi society. Here it is essential to understand a fact that in the beginning all the movements are in their original form. With time as different kinds of people join in, their lack of proper upbringing and excessive enthusiasm leads them to do undesirable things, bringing a bad name for the movement.

In this matter it is necessary to mention the personality of our

beloved Prophet (SAW). No one could be a bigger advocate of Tawheed (monotheism) than the Prophet (SAW). Yet even his enemies could not accuse him of being harsh and extreme. He put an end to idolatry and demolished the idols and still got the title of mercy to mankind. This is not a contradiction. It is one thing to have unwavering belief in one's mission and another to criticize others over every small issue due to a sense of superiority. The former is recommended while the latter is disliked.

We should remember that guidance is from Allah and man cannot become guided by himself. The Holy Quran tells us that the dwellers of paradise will testify to this truth in the following words: "All praises is due to Allah who guided us to this. And we would not have found the way if Allah had not guided us." (7:43)

Similarly, it is totally against the etiquettes of preaching Islam to pass judgments of Haram (forbidden) in every little matter and to make people feel that they are spending a major part of their day in forbidden activities. The following Hadith is a beacon of light for us in this matter: "Make things easy and do not make them difficult, and give glad tidings and do not make people runaway." (Bukhari)

The Sheikh's Personality

Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab's personality was in perfect harmony with his work. Along with his humbleness his dignified mannerisms were also noticeable. His presence was overwhelming for the people around him; whether he was silent or addressing them. He exercised great caution in his speech and disliked indecent words and pretentious talk. Although he was a very simple man, he paid great attention to hygiene and cleanliness. People would get impressed by him and would agree to listen to him as they could sense sincerity in his words. His entire life's hard work and struggle was the proof behind

this.

One of his redeeming qualities was his bravery. When he considered something correct he had no hesitation in propagating and preaching it nor did he ever let any motive or reason come in the way. He was stoned, sent into exile and even migrated for his cause. However, no ruler or pseudo scholar or ignorant member of the public could stop him from stating the truth nor could their hatred become a hurdle in his path.

In the words of Faiz Ahmed Faiz:

What befalls all travelers on that road befell me,

a solitary prison cell, my name ridiculed in public;

self-anointed holy men from their pulpits thundered,

dictators roared from their seats of power.

No treacherous arrows were spared me by strangers,

no scorn was omitted by those most esteemed,

but my heart feels shame neither for this love nor that love;

there is every scar on this heart but the scar of shame.

Sheikh had a passion and he accomplished it in a remarkable manner. For seventy years he strove for it by taking up the roles of a mujahid, preacher and writer. Sheikh did not want to see the truth to be concealed, struggling and lifeless; he wanted to see it victorious, honored and practically applied in everyday lives. One cannot imagine Islam without honor and grandeur. His early experiences taught him that if the ruling class accepts the truth, then the struggle in Allah's path can be fruitful in this world as well in the form of an Islamic state. It can be said that it was Sheikh's good fortune that he received tremendous support from the rulers of Al-e-Saud.

Sheikh's sincerity and selflessness was a very important factor behind his alliance with the Saudi rulers. If he desired he could have amassed wealth and seized power himself or could have demanded property and positions of power for his children. But the Sheikh had different motivations. He used to provide food, clothing and accommodation for the needy students from his own earnings. He would not put the burden on the state treasury and even took loans to bear these expenses. These loans would be paid off from the money provided for Dawah activities. When Sheikh died he did not have even a dirham to his name. In fact he had a debt of thousands of pounds which was later paid off by Ibne Saud

In addition to possessing the qualities of dignity, bravery, generosity, contentment and critical thinking, he was blessed with the admirable qualities of forbearance and forgiveness. Despite being a religious scholar Sheikh's brother Suleiman bin Abdul Wahab was jealous of his popularity. He would spread slander against the Sheikh in the whole of Hejaz. The extent of his opposition reached a point that he even wrote a book against his brother in which he called the Sheikh an ignorant and imprudent person. On the other hand, Sheikh wrote to him many times and tried his level best to convince him. After some time when he realized his mistake he came to apologize to the Sheikh who was overjoyed to see his brother in front of him. Despite hearing words like misguided and liar about himself, he still embraced his brother.

Apart from his brother, innumerable people who had not left any stone unturned in his enmity started coming to him one by one. Sheikh would overlook their mistakes and include them in his group. Sheikh's mission was not focused on his own self but was for the sake of Allah. Therefore, the basis of friendship and enmity was never his own personality.

Sheikh's life is a model and example for every seeker of truth.

His deep study of the Quran and Hadith at an early age enabled him to see the reality of both truth and falsehood. He saw the reign of falsehood and ignorance everywhere. Like many other scholars he could have also turned a blind eye to this and taken up the position of a preacher, concealed the crimes of the rulers and led a peaceful existence. He could have also taken refuge somewhere from the deceptions and allurements of the world. Instead, he chose to undertake the grand task of preparing a new era, a new world and new people. To serve one true God meant denouncing thousands of false gods and Sheikh chose this thorny path for himself.

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MUHAMMAD BIN QASIM

Naima Sohaib

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Translated by Rida Sohaib

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Foreword

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

Every young child raised in the subcontinent knows the name of Muhammad bin Qasim. He is, after all, the brave young warrior who brought Islam to the region. He is the noble general who answered the helpless call of Muslim prisoners and defeated numerous rajas and lords to unite the area under the banner of Islam. He is the compassionate warlord who pardoned his enemies and who won the hearts of his conquered people.

Muhammad's story is also more than that. He is the dedicated commander who stayed up at nights to pray that Allah grant them victory. He is the brilliant tactician who used his enemies' superstitions to turn the tide of battle. He is the undaunted invader, and yet the honorable protector. His is the story of

glorious triumphs and great victories, brought to a sudden, tragic end. He is the loyal, dutiful subject, obedient to his caliph even as his compliance led to his death.

Reading and translating the story of his life was a tumultuous journey, inspiring a whirlwind of emotions. Joy, pride, admiration, but also sorrow, grief, and anger. He was, and still is, a well-loved and highly esteemed man, and his story is worth a read because it explains why.

I would like to thank Naima Sohaib for inspiring me with her reverence for Muslim heroes which is reflected in her writings, and Sohaib Umar for editing this translation. May Allah SWT accept our efforts.

Rida Sohaib

Muhammad bin Qasim

The Conqueror of Sindh

Who was Muhammad bin Qasim?

His name was Muhammad, and his father's name was Qasim. He is known in history as the Conqueror of Sindh.

Birth

There is some dispute among historians about Muhammad bin Qasim's exact date of birth. According to most, he was born in 75 AH (694 CE), while others have shown through their investigation that he was born in 65 AH (684 CE). The latter claim that he had been governor of Shiraz for ten years before he conquered Sindh, and if he had been born in 695 CE, he would have been merely seven when appointed governor. This seems highly unlikely, so perhaps the second date is closer to reality.

Early Life

Not much detail is known about Muhammad's earlier years. He belonged to the tribe of Banu Thaqeef, and his father Qasim was closely related to Hajjaj bin Yusuf Thaqfi, the governor of Iraq. Many historians believe Qasim to be Hajjaj's brother and Muhammad his nephew, while others believe that they were related through marriage. Yet others suggest Muhammad was Hajjaj's cousin.

Muhammad's father Qasim was considered a brave soldier and a prideworthy son of the tribe. He was young, recently married, and the couple were expecting a child when Qasim was summoned to war. In those days, his wife saw a dream in which there was total darkness. Then a star began to brighten slowly in

the sky, after which it fell into their house and lit it up so brightly that it woke her up. This was interpreted to be an omen that she would have a very talented child. It was this child that Qasim was waiting for when he had to leave Basra to join the army to defeat the increasing presence of the Khawarij in Iraq. Merely a few days after he had left, the tragic news of his martyrdom reached Basra, throwing all those who had known the young, courageous man into grief. Qasim's widow took it specially hard, and just a few days after the news had reached her, she delivered her young son, who was named Muhammad. Young Muhammad opened his eyes to see the world without his father ever having had the opportunity to look upon his child.

Muhammad's childhood was spent in Basra, and his mother strove to obtain for him the best education possible. This was the golden era (*khair al quroon*) of Islamic history, and a large number of the Prophet's companions (*sahaba*) and their companions (*tabaeen*) were living in Basra. Historians posit that Muhammad must have seen and been in the company of the famous companion Anas bin Malik, and thus he was a *taba'ee* himself. Even from childhood, Muhammad showed signs of extraordinary wisdom and maturity. His courage as well as his talent as a warrior caught the eye of Hajjaj bin Yusuf, who wasted no time in making use of his skill, and Muhammad was appointed the governor of Shiraz and the Fars province in Persia. Although Hajjaj had the reputation of ruthlessness and cruelty, he was extremely brilliant in seeking out talented men to expand the Islamic empire. It was he who was behind the discovery and elevation of Qutayba bin Muslim, conqueror of Transoxiana (*Turkistan*), Musa bin Nusayr, conqueror of the Visgothic kingdom of Hispania (Spain, Portugal, parts of France), and of course, Muhammad bin Qasim, the young conqueror of Sindh.

Apart from the administration of the province, young Muhammad also had to quash the rebellion of various Kurdish

tribes, which he did with great success. For ten years, he governed the province very well and with great skill, garnering the respect and good opinion of Hajjaj. That is why, as times became difficult and Hajjaj needed a man of piety, courage, and wisdom, his gaze fell on Muhammad as the man of the hour.

Muhammad was busy with governance when a messenger from Basra arrived with an extraordinary summons. Muhammad had been appointed the commander in chief of the army on the Sindh front, and thus he was ordered to Basra with all haste. Utterly unprepared for such an appointment, Muhammad nevertheless wrapped up his affairs in Shiraz and left for Basra in compliance with Hajjaj's orders.

Before detailing Muhammad bin Qasim's invasion and conquest of Sindh, it is important to gain an understanding of the historical background, political conditions and the reasoning behind the conquest of Sindh.

The Situation in Sindh and Initial War Efforts

Sindh and Arabia had a long history of ties between the two areas. In his book "*Barr-e-Sagheer Mein Islam Kay Awwaleen Nuqoosh"*, Muhammad Ishaaq Bhatti writes,

"In the old times, Persia (modern day Iran) had a strong and powerful presence, and it ruled over part of Arabia. On the other end, local rulers of modern day Sindh and Balochistan were under great influence from the Persian government. This resulted in many Indian citizens joining the Persian army, some of whom settled in the Arab areas under Persian control. Therefore there existed traders who brought Indian goods to trade in Arab cities and towns, thus sparking a trade connection between the subcontinent and Arabia which grew slowly in size and prosperity."

Trade and barter gave Indian and Arab merchants access to each others' markets. Indian coconut, black pepper, sandalwood, velvet, swords, and rice were among the most popular trade items in Arabia. This trade was usually done by the Jat people of India, who belonged mainly in Debal and Makran, and some of which had settled in the coastal areas of Oman and Bahrain.

The main trade route was naval, launching from the coast of Sindh. The ships were therefore in constant danger of being set upon by pirates and robbers who knew what valuables these ships carried upon them. These pirates mostly belonged to the 'Meed' (?) people of Sindh, who tended to attack Arab ships and boats. To protect themselves from these attacks, Arab merchants often hired guards and bodyguards from amongst the 'Siabja' and the 'Biyasrah' people of Sindh, who were known for bodily strength.

Additionally, some of the Jat people who had initially been merchants settled in the coastal areas of Arabia, some becoming nomads (bedouins), and others forming villages and towns. Thus before the advent of Islam, trade was a major factor in the connections and ties between the Hindus of Sindh, and the Arabs. As Islam spread and brought with itself a change in the political and living conditions of Arabia, Sindh as all other neighbouring areas felt its impact as well.

The Prophet Muhammad PBUH was sent to all of humanity, and he had begun the efforts to spread the message of Islam to the rest of the world in his lifetime. By the time of his passing, Islam had spread in the Arabian peninsula, and had attracted the attention of surrounding areas. After the Prophet left this world, it was his companions who carried the mantle, and they fulfilled their responsibility very well. Islam was thus conveyed to the edges of the civilized world, its message and guidance available to all those who were willing to see the truth.

India's importance to the Muslims was thus twofold. Firstly, it was one of the areas where the message of Islam had to be spread, and secondly, it was an important stop on various trade routes, and security was required for the merchant ships to pass unmolested on their way to their destinations. These ships were in danger not only from pirates and looters, but also from the local rulers of thr coastal settlements, who often allied with the pirates to take advantage of and rob the ships of their enemies. For an emerging world power like the Islamic empire, it was essential that their trading routes on the sea and the coastal strips be safe and secure. Thus during the rule of Caliph Umar, the governor of Oman and Bahrain Uthman bin Abi Aas sent his brother Hakam bin Aas to the coastal area of the Bharuch and Kathiawar in the state of Gujrat. This attack was carried out without first obtaining the permission of Caliph Umar. Although it was successful, the Muslims returned with the spoils of war but without attempting to occupy the seaport. When Caliph Umar received news of the attack, he sent a strict reprimand to Uthman bin Abi Aas RA, saying,

"My Thaqfi brother, you sent an ant out into the ocean with only a wooden board as its support. I swear that if the army had run into trouble so far away from home, I would have taken from your tribe Thaqif as many men as you had sent into trouble."

A while after, Uthman bin Abi Aas obtained permission from Caliph Umar to send the army into Sindh, towards Debal. The army conquered successfully under the command of Mugheera bin Aas, but his martyrdom forced them to return once more without maintaining an occupation. Raja Chuch was the governor of Sindh at the time. Muslims continued the occasional skirmishes, conquering Makran. The governor of Iraq, Abu Musa Ash'ari, sent troops for this purpose. After the conquest, the spoils were sent to the capital of the Caliphate under the supervision of the companion Sahar bin Abbas. When

the Caliph Umar asked him about the land that they had conquered, he replied,

“Makran’s land is thirsty. It does not flower, nor does it produce fruit worth eating. The people there tend to loot and rob others – that is their livelihood. If we keep a small part of the army there, they will be robbed. And if we keep a larger number of men, they will die of thirst and starvation.”

Hearing this account, Caliph Umar was resolved. He said firmly,

“Those who fight in God’s way cannot be left to starve. It would be a great insult and a great shame, if the men who have forced the surrender of the caesars of Rome and Persia were robbed while sleeping, or if they were to die for lack of food.”

Therefore a small part of Makran was kept under Muslim rule, and the idea of further expansion was abandoned. The same thing happened under the rule of Caliph Uthman, when he sent Hakeem bin Jabla Abdi to India to scout for a potential military expedition. He gave the Caliph the same advice that the companion Sahar had given Caliph Umar; thus the possibility of further expansion was discarded. Only some coastal strips remained under Muslim control so that their trade routes and ships could be secured. In the rule of Caliph Ali, the Muslim army advanced. They entered Sindh through Makran, and then conquered Kalat. By the end of the Rashidun Caliphate, Muslims had reached into India. Sindh in particular was fortunate in this sense that around 25 companions of the Prophet and 50 or so followers of these companions (*taba’een*) settled there, for the sake of jihad and spreading the message of Islam.

The Historical Background of Muhammad's Attack on Sindh

Unlike the Rashidun Caliphate, the Umayyads had monarchical tendencies. Kings do not tolerate opposition and dissent, and this often leads to rebellion in dissatisfied segments of society. Thus was the case in 65 AH under the ruler of Caliph Marwan bin Hakam, where two brothers from a tribe in Oman, Muawiyyah and Muhammad bin Haris Alafi, travelled to Sindh. There they killed the governor of Makran, Sa'eed bin Aslam Kalabi, and had soon brought the whole region under their control. The cause of their rebellion was rooted in the tyranny of the Umaayyad regime. When Hajjaj bin Yusuf was made governor of Iraq, he was also given responsibility for all eastern matters. He sent several letters in succession to various officials in conquered Sindh, instructing them to rule properly and in accordance with the Umayyad rule, but his efforts were in vain and the area remained under control of the Alafi brothers.

Their influence was partially due to the ruler of Sindh, Raja Dahir, son of Raja Chuch. He ruled almost the entire area, with the exception of some coastal strips which were under Muslim control. Raja Dahir backed the Alafi brothers, because when the Raja of Ramal had attacked him, the Alafi brothers had helped him fight and win. He thus understood the utility they held, and supported their control of Makran. Soon this area was teeming with rebels who had fled from the Umayyad dynasty, and they settled in the coastal areas of Sindh and Makran.

Hajjaj bin Yusuf was a strong ruler and a hard man. It was utterly unbearable for him to countenance that conspirators against the government should have a stronghold in neighbouring countries, and that these countries should not only give them refuge but also encourage rebellion and conspiracy in the Muslim world. Raja Dahir found it very convenient to have his enemy, the powerful Muslim empire, at odds with its own

rebelling people, and to witness both factions destroy each other. Hajjaj bin Yusuf soon gained control over the situation, and Makran once again flew the Muslim empire's banner. The political environment had become relatively stable when an event occurred which left indelible marks on the history of Sindh.

The isle of Serendib (Ceylon), modern day Sri Lanka, held a significant amount of Muslims. Some traveling merchants from the Muslim world had stopped here a while, and they liked the atmosphere and the friendly people enough to settle permanently. The ruler of Serendib wished for friendly relations with the Muslims, and was always on the lookout for opportunities to improve ties. Such an opportunity arose when an Arab man living there died, and the women and children of his family expressed a desire to return to their Arab homeland. Some merchants were also intending to visit the Arabian peninsula for the sake of pilgrimage. When the ruler heard of the impending expedition, he decided to provide the ships for their travels, and offered some more boats laden with gifts to be sent to the Muslim Caliph to gain his good will.

These ships were traveling from Serendib towards the Persian Gulf when strong winds blew them off course onto the shores of Debal. The pirates roaming the waters were always on the prowl, and they caught wind of the misfortune of these ships. Very quickly they made their presence known, and after looting the ships they began attacking and capturing the travellers, most of whom were women and children. One of the Arab women belonging to the tribe Bani Yarboo' began screaming out of fear, calling for the governor of Iraq to rescue her, "O Hajjaj! O Hajjaj! Help me!" The pirates imprisoned the Muslims in Debal according to one account, and in Aror according to another.

The matter soon came to Hajjaj's attention. He was also informed that the captives have reached Raja Dahir, and that the

pirates have his full support and backing. When he heard that a daughter of Arabia had called for him by name, he was suffused by passionate anger. "*Labbaik* (I am here)," he cried in reply, and dictated a letter to Raja Dahir where he demanded the immediate return of the captives and the money that they had been robbed of, as well as a compensation amount for having captured innocent Muslims without provocation.

When Hajjaj's messenger read out the letter in Raja Dahir's court, he calmly replied,

"The people that robbed the ships are a majestic and strong people. It is very difficult to obtain back the wealth and people that they have taken. Sindh's law does not apply to them."

Raja Dahir wished to show from his reply that he carried no blame for the incident, nor did he have any interest or sympathy for the plight of the captives.

Hajjaj had not expected such a reply. He was the governor of an emerging superpower which had spread to Europe in the west, Africa in the south, and Constantinople (Turkey) in the north. Furious and seething, he wrote a long letter to the Caliph Walid bin Abdul Mulk in which he expounded upon the events that had occurred, and asked permission for an attack on Sindh. The Caliph refused to grant this permission. Hajjaj wrote again, promising that he would send double the cost of this campaign back to the Caliphate. Finally, reluctantly, the Caliph was persuaded and gave his permission for the army to advance into Sindh.

Hajjaj had prepared for the attack already. At once he sent out troops under the leadership of Abdullah bin Banhan, who attacked immediately after reaching Sindh. The first day of the fighting saw the martyrdom of Abdullah bin Banhan, which caused a loss of morale amongst the fighters, and they were forced to retreat. Hajjaj sent another army under Badeel bin

Tehfa towards Debal, but the same thing occurred. Badeel fought very well and courageously, but he too was martyred, and the remaining Muslims were unable to rally without a center. They retreated as well.

Two successive defeats were unacceptable to Hajjaj. His face reddened with anger and humiliation when he was given news of the second army's defeat, and he resolved to not give up. He would prepare better this time, and he would send the army under the command of Muhammad bin Qasim, in whom he had full trust.

When the news of the two defeats reached the Caliph, he was very displeased. He wrote a strict reprimand to Hajjaj, and summoned him immediately to Damascus, the capital. Instead of obeying the summons, Hajjaj wrote to him another letter, presenting himself thus:

"I obtained your permission for the attack on the condition that I would send twice the cost of the campaign to the royal coffers. I will obey your summons when I am able to fulfill this condition. The importance of gaining control over Sindh has increased. Now I will send my nephew Muhammad bin Qasim on the Sindh campaign. I hope that your honor will not allow any less, and that I will not be stopped. I wish for the chance to acquit myself honourably in front of my nation."

Caliph Walid knew his governor very well, and he knew Hajjaj was an obstinate man. When set on a course, it was very difficult to detract him from his chosen path. Therefore the Caliph once more reluctantly gave Hajjaj permission to attack Sindh.

Muhammad bin Qasim at the Sindh Front

After committing to a full attack on Sindh, Hajjaj threw himself into preparations with a passion. He summoned Muhammad bin

Qasim to Basra from Shiraz where he had been governor, and gave him the particulars of the situation. Hajjaj was not in a rush anymore; he wanted to attack only after the utmost preparation and planning.

To begin the first stage, six thousand men on foot and on horses were selected under Hajjaj's particular supervision, and their training commenced in Basra. A proclamation was sent to the various cities and towns of Iraq and Syria, claiming that those who would distinguish themselves in tournaments involving horseriding, spear throwing, weapon fighting and wrestling would be selected for joining the Sindh army, and they and their family would receive special dispensations and benefits. The offer of reward along with the emotional appeal was so attractive that the greatest and most skilled fighters in the region began to pay attention.

Another stage of the preparations involved obtaining food supplies and weaponry. Hajjaj knew that the area into which he was sending his precious army was barren and poor, and that the air and water might be utterly unsuited to the Arab constitution. Thus any and all supplies that could be potentially needed were gathered and packed, down to needles and thread to repair torn clothing. Vinegar was not available in the region of Sindh, so bread was soaked in vinegar and then dried and packed, so that in times of hunger, the bread could be dampened before eating and the soldiers would be able to enjoy a flavor of vinegar in their bread rather than plain.

For the part of the army that was on foot, six thousand fast camels were arranged so that long distances could be crossed with speed and with less fatigue. High quality horses were selected for the riders to maximise their performance on the battlefield. Among the weaponry, the most impressive and prominent were the cannons. The cannon named '*Uroos'* (bride in Arabic) was considered to be the biggest and most dangerous.

It was so heavy that dozens of men had to pull it to make it move, and it had the capability of creating a hole in a castle's outer walls by throwing incredibly heavy stones at a very fast velocity.

Eventually, the army was readied with all its supplies and weapons, and it set off from Basra towards Shiraz, where Muhammad bin Qasim was waiting for it. Muhammad took over the organization of the army affairs, and sent scouts into Sindh to gauge the political situation. To gain all the information, finalize the strategy, and put the finishing touch on supplies took another couple of months, and then the army was finally ready for advancement into Sindh.

Muhammad himself travelled on land to get to Sindh, while his naval force, bearing one of the time's best armies, reached the coast of Makran some time later. The governor there, Muhammad bin Haroon Nameeri, came out personally to welcome the army. Muhammad bin Haroon was in very poor health at the time, but he pushed aside health concerns to guide Muhammad bin Qasim, having long discussions about the area's political climate, conditions, and dangers. Muhammad and his army received full support and cooperation from the Muslims in Makran.

The Alafi brothers and the threat they had posed to the Umayyad dynasty has been mentioned earlier. Although they no longer ruled Makran, they carried significant influence in the area. Muhammad bin Qasim worried that if they backed Raja Dahir in the fight, it could create a huge problem for the Muslim army and potentially ruin the campaign. In secret, therefore, he sent them a request for a truce. In return, the Alafi brothers assured him of their support, but added the condition that their support must be kept secret due to their delicate situation. Some historians have considered this bald-faced hypocricy, since they

had previously indicated to Raja Dahir that he would have their support at any sign of danger.

Another month passed while the ground reality and local information provided by the governor of Makran was incorporated into strategy and planning. Now ready, Muhammad bin Qasim advanced towards Debal. On his way, he conquered some small districts like Qanzpur (modern day Panjgur in Pakistan) and then Armaeel (modern day Bela in the Lasbela district of Balochistan, Pakistan). During this, Muhammad bin Haroon Nameeri passed away, and was buried in Bela. Muhammad's sights were now on Debal, his first destination.

The Conquest of Debal – a Milestone in Sindh's History

On a Friday in the month of Ramadan, in the year 93 AH (712 CE), Muhammad bin Qasim stepped into the boundaries of the city Debal with his army. The army, consisting of 8,000 very well trained fighters, was brimming with resolution and a determination to win. Hajjaj was in constant contact with Muhammad and the army generals. Outposts had been established along the way from Makran to Basra(?) which allowed messages to travel at more than twice their normal speed. Before the fight, Hajjaj instructed his general and his army in these words,

"... And when you go into Sindh, watch your camps. As you near Debal, increase your caution. Wherever you camp, dig trenches. Stay awake and alert at night. Sleep less. The soldiers who can recite the Quran should do so. The rest, spend your time in prayer and worship. Remember God at all times. Ask Him for success. Be humble, but hope for victory."

Along with some more instructions, the letter conveyed the order to commence an attack immediately. Soon the city was surrounded. Debal's ruler paid homage to Raja Dahir and was

utterly loyal to him. Thus he decided to allow the city to be besieged and fight from inside the castle walls.

Muhammad installed cannons all around the city walls, but whenever the Muslim soldiers tried to load and fire the cannons, the archers on top of the city battlements shot arrows at and injured them, forcing them to retreat. The other strategy that Debal's ruler adopted was to repeatedly have men on fast horses ride out suddenly from the castle, launch a lightning fast attack on the Muslim troops, and then return as quickly as they had arrived, leaving little time for a counterattack. The fight was thus being prolonged, and endangering the lives of Muslim soldiers for no gain. Muhammad bin Qasim thus decided to change tactics.

Muhammad formulated a plan to bring the cannons very close to the castle walls. This close, the Muslim and Hindu soldiers were in hearing range of each other, and they exchanged words. The Hindu soldiers mocked the Muslims, saying that the Muslims had better give up on the idea of conquering Debal, because the city was under the protection of the Hindu gods and thus could not be harmed. When these conversations were reported to Muhammad bin Qasim, he investigated further, finding that there was a huge shrine (called Deval) in the middle of Debal city, and that the city had been named after the shrine, which later became Debal. The people of the city were superstitious and utterly convinced of the omniscience and magnificence of their gods and their temple. The temple itself was a masterpiece of grandeur and resplendence, stunning all those who saw it. The domes in particular were majestic and eye-catching, visible from a large distance. The largest dome had a huge flag flying from a pole attached to its top. Whenever the wind blew, the large shadow that the flag cast vibrated and moved across the city, striking awe into the denizens of the city.

According to historians, Muhammad bin Qasim, realizing the importance of the temple and the flag to the morale of the citizens, he decided to make it a potential target. This decision had three benefits. The citizens of the city would lose morale and be greatly affected psychologically if the flag or temple went down. Targeting the flag also meant less civilian casualties, which was always an important consideration to the Muslim army. Finally, the fall of the so-called all-powerful gods' temple would help remove the superstitions of the people, exposing to them the truth of what they had been led to believe and inclining their hearts more towards the monotheistic message of Islam. To bring this idea to life, the cannon named 'Uroos' was chosen. A Syrian soldier named Ja'oona Salmi, an excellent marksman, directed dozens of soldiers in aiming and firing the cannon at the flag on top of the biggest dome on the temple in the middle of the city. The cannonball hit its mark and the dome collapsed amongst its rubble with a loud explosion. The flag came down, and the Muslim army raised a huge cry of "Allahu Akbar!"

The situation was entirely unprecedented and totally unexpected for the castle's residents and soldiers. In great chaos and disorganization, they came out of the castle gates to attack, where the Muslim soldiers were lying in wait. The counterattack was so strong that the defending soldiers were forced to retreat back into castle walls, closing the gates. Inside, the city's residents were panicked and frightened. Using the chaos to their advantage, the Muslim soldiers threw lassoed ropes over the castle walls and began climbing. Sa'di bin Khazeema had the honour of being the first man to reach the top of the castle wall. One by one, the other Muslim soldiers followed, and soon the castle gates had been opened and the Muslim army had flooded the city.

Seeing the tide turn, the ruler of the city, Hakim Samni, had already fled for Hyderabad. Muhammad bin Qasim forbade

anyone from harming the women, the children, and the elderly. Non-combatant civilians were not prosecuted, in fact, only a couple of the top army officials were put to death. A historical account suggests that this was when the Muslim prisoners were released from Debal and sent back to Arabia under protection, while other historians have written that the Muslim prisoners were in reality in Raja Dahir's captivity and thus were only released after decisive victory.

Debal's conquest was the first big milestone in the campaign for Sindh. The spoils obtained from the city were grand. Several citizens also expressed an interest in learning about Islam, and many became Muslim. Muhammad bin Qasim supervised the building of a mosque in the city, then left some Muslims there to supervise education and administration, leaving with the rest for his next destination.

Debal was a majestic city of historical Sindh. Some people consider a castle on the mount of Manora Island as the geographical location of Debal, while others believe the area Dhabeji, located 50 km north of Karachi, as the more likely location. It is difficult now to determine the exact historical location of this grand city, when thirteen hundred years ago it was important enough to have Muhammad bin Qasim spend much time and effort conquering it before he continued on his campaign for Sindh.

Raja Dahir's Letter to Muhammad bin Qasim

After the conquest of Debal, Raja Dahir's messenger brought a very threatening letter to Muhammad bin Qasim. An excerpt from his letter is as follows,

"This message is from Dahir, son of Chuch, the king of Sindh and a raja of India. This letter is from Dahir, whose rule of law is obeyed by the rivers, the jungles, the deserts, and the mountains. This message is towards the young, inexperienced

Arab general Muhammad bin Qasim, who is merciless in killing humans, and greedy for material goods, and who has been a fool by throwing his army into death and destruction."

After thus starting the letter, Raja Dahir warned Muhammad not to be too boastful about his victory in Debal, because Debal was a city of merchants, not warriors. If there had been even a single of his army generals there, not one of the Muslims would have survived. At the end of the letter, Raja Dahir announced his intention to send his son Jaisiah to fight Muhammad, not forgetting to mention that his army would have elephants, which he thought would pose a major problem for the Muslim army from Arabia.

Muhammad sent his own letter in reply. It is too long to be quoted here, but suffice to say that he was not in the least intimidated by the arrogance or contempt that Raja Dahir's letter dripped with. He very clearly presented his position, saying,

"I know that you have might, weapons, and elephants. You rely on them. Our power is less, and we have no elephants. But our greatest power lies in the trust we have in God, and His help and blessings that we carry with us."

At the end, he mentioned his reasons for coming to India, writing,

"It was your unfriendly actions that forced me to come here to teach you a lesson. I have invaded your country not for the sake of conquest or to gain land and wealth, but to struggle in the way of God, and to gain His pleasure."

The Conquest of Neroon

After the conquest of Debal and the arrangement of administrative affairs, Muhammad bin Qasim went on his way

to Neroon (Hyderabad). This area is around 60 to 65 miles far from Debal. Neroon's ruler, Sandar Shimni, paid tribute to Raja Dahir, but he was of the Buddhist inclination and therefore preferred to avoid war and conflict as much as possible. Most residents of Neroon were Buddhist as well. They did not care about Raja Dahir's rule, nor were they willing to die to defend his power. When Sandar Shimni heard the reports of Muhammad bin Qasim travelling in his direction, he came to the conclusion that it would be foolish to put the lives of his people in the path of danger. He had previously sent a message of goodwill to Hajjaj. Now, he was willing to pay tribute too. Raja Dahir had been informed of these developments, but he had not taken any decisive action immediately because coastal rulers often took such steps to protect themselves from local enemies.

Seeing the change in currents, Raja Dahir could not find it prudent to rely on Sandar Shimni's loyalty towards him, and summoned him to court with several trumped up excuses. These multiple summons left Sandar Shimni no choice, and he was forced to present himself to his ruler. Instead of sending him back with royal orders, Raja Dahir forcibly detained him at court. On the other hand, he sent his loyal people to Neroon to turn the opinions of the people in his favour. When Muhammad reached Neroon with his army, Sandar Shimni was trapped between his enemies, and the city was without a ruler and in the protection of guards. The army, apparently filled with Raja Dahir's supporters, refused to open the city gates. When Sandar Shimni heard of the ongoing tension in Aror, he escaped quietly and snuck into Neroon. As soon as he was seen by the people, their spirits recovered. Raja Dahir's people subsided, and after taking his people into confidence, Sandar Shimni opened the gates for the Muslims. Sandar himself welcomed Muhammad and accompanied him into the city.

Using his innate wisdom, Muhammad bin Qasim kept Sandar as the governor of the city, but appointed his own man as the sheriff. This strategy and the respectful treatment of the people impressed and amazed the citizens of Neroon. Thus when Muhammad announced the building of a mosque in the city, the people were eager to contribute. Some troublemakers tried to turn the people against the Muslims, but they were caught red-handed and stopped.

After arranging the administrative affairs of Neroon, Muhammad wrote a detailed letter to Hajjaj and obtained permission to advance further. History books say that when Hajjaj received this letter, he had just read another from the great general Qutaiba bin Muslim Bahli, telling him of the Muslim army's entry into the boundaries of China, and the victories in the Eastern areas of the land. Muhammad's letter bore the good tidings of a victory in Neroon. Both of his generals were asking permission to advance. Hajjaj sent the same reply to both of them. "Move forward… as much as you can."

Advance towards Siwistan

The next destination of the Muslims was Siwistan (modern day Sehwan Sharif). The ruler of Siwistan was Buddhist too, as were the majority of the citizens. Having learnt his lesson from Neroon, Raja Dahir deposed the local ruler at once, and sent his own nephew Bajay Raai there in his place. There were several small Budhdhist settlements around the main city. As soon as they got wind of Muhammad bin Qasim's impending arrival, they sent a delegation to Bajay Raai, saying that they wanted to avoid conflict and bloodshed, and they would appreciate if Bajay Raai could spare some of his army for their protection. This request was viewed by much contempt by Bajay Raai, who sent them away with a definite refusal. This same delegation now went to Muhammad bin Qaism, extending a hand in

friendship, and offered to pay tribute in exchange for protection. Their offer was accepted by Muhammad, who agreed to take on the responsibility for their protection.

The situation inside the city boundaries was no different. The people of the city conferred with each other and decided upon sending a delegation of Buddhist monks to Muhammad bin Qasim instead of to Bajay Raai. When he heard, Bajay Raai was incensed at the perceived treachery of his people. He threw the chosen delegation into prison and instead began to prepare for the upcoming battle with great pomp and circumstance. A part of his strategy was to use the tactics of the Muslim army against them to unsettle and outrage them. For this purpose, one of the cannons of the Muslim army was chosen and smuggled into the city. The cannons were considered to be a trademark weapon of the Arabs and had never been used before in Sindh. By the time the Muslims reached the city walls and surrounded them, the cannon they had lost was staring down at them from the castle wall – a slap in the face. Muhammad sensed the danger immediately. To allow the enemy to keep the cannon and reverse engineer more for their use would be disastrous. With this in mind, he took immediate action. The cannon 'Uroos' was brought into the field once more, and with a single blast, the stolen cannon on the castle wall had been obliterated.

The castle was very well-fortified, and its walls appeared strong and impenetrable. It was apparent to Muhammad that to conquer this city would be no easy task. The enemies had engaged as soon as the Muslims arrived, and after heavy losses on the Indian side, they had retreated within the castle with the gates tightly sealed. Archers positioned on top of the castle battlements were raining down arrows on the Muslim army. When a few days had passed without a change in the standoff, Muhammad began to look for a new strategy.

It so happened that one of the sympathizers from inside the castle indicated to Muhammad a position where the ground was a marsh, and where pungent water always gathered. Both armies had been giving the area a wide berth because of that reason. This was the weak spot, where a tunnel could be dug to reach inside the castle. The strategy appealed to Muhammad. Under the cover of darkness, he directed his best experts in tunnel digging to arrange this as quickly as possible. During the digging, the water repeatedly seeped in, filling up the tunnel and making it difficult to continue. An emergency drainage system for the water was constructed, allowing the diggers to continue with their work. They were in a great hurry, because with the break of dawn, their cover would be exposed and their plan obvious for the world to see. Before morning had arrived, several Muslim soldiers had made their way inside the boundaries of the castle wall. As soon as they could, they launched an attack on the guards manning the castle gates, who were totally unprepared for an attack from within. The courageous soldiers defeated the slight resistance that they faced with the utmost ease and threw open the gates. The Muslim army waiting outside flooded in at once, throwing the castle guards and soldiers into chaos and anarchy. Hearing the sounds of battle cries and the clashing of swords, Bajay Raai realized what had happened and fled from the castle. Siwistan had been conquered, and the Muslim flag flew proudly from atop the castle.

According to Muslim conventions in war times, Muhammad treated the non combatants of the city with gentleness and compassion. Some of the prisoners of war and army generals were punished. The tax introduced was set at a small amount so as not to impose upon the people. Hajjaj was sent a detailed letter about the victory, setting out an overview of the battle, the number of casualties and injured, an account of the spoils, and the administration of the area. Sending a fifth of the spoils to the

caliphate's treasury, Muhammad set his sights upon Sisum, the ruler of which had granted refuge to Bajay Raai.

Muhammad bin Qasim in Sisum

Sisum was the biggest stronghold in the area of Bodhia. Historians suggest it was located somewhere around Lake Manchar in modern day Pakistan. The ruler here, Kaka, much like the majority of his citizens, was also Buddhist. According to the teachings of his religion, he was also against conflict and war, but ever since he had given refuge to Bajay Raai, the former ruler had been whispering in his area, inciting him to fight to defend his country from these barbaric invaders. He assured the Sisum ruler that he and the few soldiers that had escaped with him would support him in his endeavours. His insistence even took him to announce that he would conduct military training within the citadel. Some people from the Jaat tribe had also arrived to meet with Raja Kaka, ready to fight the Muslims and offer their cooperation in case of war. The Jaat tribe was considered to be fierce, and they were famous for their warrior skills and for being willing to die to defend their honour and country. Taking advantage of their reputation, Bajay Raai succeeded in persuading Raja Kaka to make a stand against the Muslims. The Jaats planned to attack Muslims under the cover of darkness, when they would be sleeping. Raja Kaka, on the say so of Bajay Raai, selected a thousand talented men from his army to accompany them.

A lot of preparations were required before the mission could take place. The pandits were asked which hour would be the blessed hour for attacking, and according to Hindu traditions, an innocent person was killed as a sacrifice to please the gods and increase chances of victory. After all this, a company of around 1800 men, including the Jaats, Bajay Raai's soldiers, and Raja Kaka's soldiers, left in the dark of the night to surprise the Muslim army camp with an attack. Bajay Raai and Raja Kaka

spent that night in agonizing suspense, waiting to hear the good news of the defeat of Muhammad bin Qasim and his army.

Muhammad and his army were camped a few miles away, unaware of the conspiracy and spending the night in prayer and worship. They had been ordered to do so by Hajjaj, and it was part of a Muslim army's routine in any case. The night passed by uneventfully, and after dawn prayers, Muhammad received the news that an attack had been planned for last night, but that it never came to pass. Apparently the Jaat soldiers and Raja Kaka's men had returned defeated after spending the night wandering around, looking for the Muslim army campsite. Although their scouts had pinpointed their exact location earlier, the darkness of the night had confused them totally and protected the unsuspecting Muslims. When Raja Kaka received back his embarrassed men, humiliation and anger overtook him completely. Flatly, he told Bajay Raai that he would not be a part of this conflict any longer, and he would atone for his earlier foolishness by saving his people from any further bloodshed. He ordered Bajay Raai to leave, now convinced that the Muslim army matched the description detailed in their ancient texts of the conquering army that would one day overtake the land. He sent a truce offering to Muhammad bin Qasim and assured him of his cooperation and obedience. Muhammad gladly accepted the peace offering, with generous terms and conditions. Judging the Raja to be sincere in his intentions, Muhammad retained him as the local ruler in a ceremony.

Bajay Raai, on the other hand, had not yet given up. He visited the nearby tribes and their leaders, inciting them to violence and rebellion against the change in leadership, using the success of the Muslims to ignite their passions. He was somewhat successful in his efforts, and rebellion broke out in surrounding areas which Raja Kaka was unable to quell despite his best efforts. Muhammad bin Qasim was eventually forced to send

some of his representatives to bring the rebellion under control. After a few skirmishes, Bajay Raai was killed by his own supporters and the entire area came under Muslim control.

After the Muslim victory, some of the local leaders expressed an interest in converting to the new religion. They were treated with great courtesy, and Muhammad himself taught them about the teachings of Islam and heard their testimony as they became Muslim. After the administrative affairs had been settled, he sent a victory letter to Hajjaj detailing the events that had occurred, and sent the required amount from the spoils of war. In his reply, Hajjaj persuaded Muhammad that the Muslim army needed rest before they faced direct conflict with Raja Dahir's army.

The Young General on the Path to Success

Giving his soldiers some rest before the big confrontation did not mean Muhammad was ready to be idle. He was an active, energetic general, so he decided to travel towards Neroon. Conquering the smaller castles along the way, he reached the area of Ashihar. The political situation there was odd, revolving around Raja Vasayo and his two sons Raasil and Moko. Raja Vasayo was the ruler of the citadel named Bait in the area Rankuch. Despite being under Raja Dahir's authority, he had managed to establish some degree of autonomy for himself. Raja Vasayo had clashed with his son Moko about his marital status, and Moko had taken his share and separated from his father. Being a principled man and a compassionate ruler, he was very much loved by his people. When he heard of the arrival of the Muslims, the good character that their army exhibited, and the Islamic teachings that often matched with his own world view, he decided to give them his loyalty.

When Muhammad reached the castle Ashiha in Rankuch and forced Raja Vasayo to surrender arms within a week, Moko sent a secret message to Muhammad bin Qasim. He explained that to

yield without a fight would be humiliating and demoralising to his people, so he wanted to put on a show of being arrested by Muhammad's forces. Muhammad obliged this request, and his subordinate Bananah bin Hanzala placed Moko under arrest. As traditional, Muhammad treated him with respect and courtesy, and appointed him as his representative rule of the whole citadel of Bait.

Having conquered the surrounding areas, Muhammad now wanted to deal with his original enemy. Raja Dahir too was seething after the numerous defeats of his appointed rulers, and he was eager to confront Muhammad himself.

Raja Dahir – A Cornered Lion

In Aror, his seat of power, Raja Dahir could be compared to a wounded lion, roaring with anger and frustration, but helpless to change his situation. When Muhammad bin Qasim had first stepped into Sindh, he had barely paid any attention. Muslims had tried before to enter Sindh, and the coastal strips that they had brought under control had been enough for them. He had believed that even if Muhammad had the audacity to advance further, one of his numerous rajas with their armies would stop and defeat him before he got too far. His alarm only rose when Muhammad succeeded in conquering one area after the other, only to begin advancing towards his own center of power. This time, he himself would enter the field, having realized that his rule of Sindh was in actual danger. The last and decisive battle seemed to be at hand.

Before the fight, according to Islamic tradition, Muhammad sent two of his special representatives to Raja Dahir's court to ensure all other venues had been exhausted. Molana Islami and Shaikh Shami were the two he chose to send as a delegation. Molana Islami was a local citizen from the city of Debal. He had embraced Islam at the hand of Muhammad after the conquest of his city He had then thrown himself into learning

the teachings and traditions of Islam from the Muslims stationed there, astonishing them with the depth of the knowledge he was able to gain in such a short while. Muhammad bin Qasim had given him the title Molana Islami for his dedication to the religion and to gaining and understanding knowledge. Shaikh Shami, on the other hand, was a confidant of Muhammad and an eloquent and persuasive speaker. These representatives stepped into the court of Raja Dahir boldly and without any trace of fear, under the protection of twenty spearmen on horses.

Raja Dahir was incensed at this perceived lack of courtesy and disrespect. His voice cracked like a whip in the silent room as he said, “Perhaps you have not been taught the etiquettes of entering the court of a king!” In reply, Molana Islami said in the local dialect, “We know only the etiquettes of entering the court of God.”

This reply only infuriated Raja Dahir further.

“You were our servant. You know very well that you should bow in the presence of your king!”

Molana Islami replied,

“When I was your servant, I did bow to you. Now that I am a Muslim, I understand that the only entity deserving to be bowed to is God. Your way is wrong. I come to show you the right path, because that is what Islam has done for me.”

This was beyond the pale to the king. “If killing a messenger was not against all traditions, I would have you beheaded on the spot,” he said, spitting with anger. In answer to this threat, Shaikh Shami asked Molana Islami to convey in the local tongue the sentiment that if you had us killed, it would not be a big loss to the Muslim army, but you would have to pay a heavy price for our blood. This reply served only to boil the king’s

blood further, but he had enough control over himself not to explode, biting out, “Say what you have come to say and leave!”

The messengers said, “Our general asks if you will cross the river to our side, or if we should cross the river to yours. He also says that whoever crosses the river, the other should allow him to cross in peace.”

Consulting with his advisors, Raja Dahir decided that the Muslims should cross the river. The messengers left, leaving the raja in great turmoil and anxiety. He could see his control slipping, could almost taste the danger in the air. He gave the orders for the war preparations to be intensify. The citizens were already nervous about the incoming army, having heard enough tales of their daring and victories to have some idea about how this was going to play out. The religious priests dedicated their days and nights to prayers of victory and triumph over the Muslims. Offerings and sacrifices were made to various gods. The fear and dread had permeated every level of society, and this now appeared to be a war between two religions.

A Period of Trials

On one side of the battle, Raja Dahir was absorbed in the preparations for war, while on the other, Muhammad bin Qasim was also fully invested in ensuring victory in the upcoming battle. After the open challenge to Raja Dahir had been ensued, a trial awaited the Muslims. The horses that the Muslim army had brought with them happened to graze upon some grass that turned out to be poisonous. Soon the horses had become weak, falling ill and then eventually dying. Within a couple of days, there had been a massive amount of deaths. This was highly worrying – an army without horses against an army on horses and elephants stood very little chance of success; indeed, it would be a slaughterhouse. Muhammad was restless and

worried, his nights sleepless. He stayed up late worshipping God and praying for a solution and a victory. An answer to the problem had not yet been found when reports of an uprising in Sisum reached Muhammad. The young general refused to panic, instead reacting with the utmost calm and composure. He sent an experienced officer of his army, Muhammad bin Mus'ab along with a hundred riders and two hundred men on foot to Sisum to get there as fast as possible and ensure that it stayed under Muslim occupation.

Muhammad had wanted to keep the news of the horses falling sick as quiet as possible, but his intentions were foiled and Raja Dahir's scouts sent him the good news that the Muslim army was in trouble. Raja Dahir immediately sent Muhammad a message saying that he still had time for a retreat before his army was trampled by the elephants the Indians had as part of theirs. Muhammad's reply to this threat was hard and uncowed, along the lines of, "if I were to return, I would take your head with me."

Muhammad's approach and impression had been so bold and undaunted from the beginning that Raja Dahir could not help but feel apprehensive. He took no immediate advantage of the news and refrained from attacking the Muslims just then. The situation soon took a turn for the better. The news arrived from Sisum that the the city had been freed from the rebels, while Hajjaj had sent 2000 refreshed horses and a vet to aid the Muslim army. In addition, he had also sent dried cotton that had been soaked in vinegar, with instructions to soak them in water and then give that water to the horses before they feed. This was meant to help them recover from the poison that was making them so ill. In his letter, Hajjaj also gave the command to commence attack as soon as the horses were well-recovered. Muhammad obeyed these instructions, setting off as soon as the horses were better once more. Raja Dahir's army was already

camped on the eastern bank of the Indus River. It was now up to the Muslims to cross the river to the other side.

The Bridge of Ships

It was no easy feat to arrange for a large army and their supplies and weapons to cross the river. The enemy held a strong, favourable position on the other bank, and their archers stood at the ready to cut down as much of the Muslim army as they could while they crossed the river one by one. Muhammad came up with a unique solution to this dilemma. He chose a part of the river which was narrow but where the water was relatively deep. A large amount of boats were obtained from Moko, who had by now become a staunch ally of the Muslims. Each boat was then attached to thick, heavy rope, and this rope was used to bind the boats to each other. In the darkness of the night, some of the Muslim soldiers were sent to cross the river, taking with them the other end of the rope which was then tied to heavy linchpins at the other bank. The boats on the Muslim side of the river were thus bound to each other and also to the linchpins at the other side of the river. Muslim soldiers gently pushed the boats into the river.

Raja Dahir's army was astonished at the spectacle the next day. A long, odd bridge, made of boats, stretched from the east to the west, drifting towards the other end of the river. The boats held ready archers who were prepared to return any volley of arrows with their own. In the twinkling of an eye, the entire army, consisting of thousands of men, camels, horses, and heavy weaponry, had succeeded in crossing the river. Utterly bewildered, the enemy army watched helplessly, unable to stop them crossing safely, and soon the Muslims had reached the other side. As soon as they had disembarked, they found Raja Dahir's son Jay Seena (some accounts suggest his name was Jay Singh) ready for an immediate confrontation. Muhammad appointed some of his officials to lead the battle. He had heard

already that Raja Dahir did not intend to make an appearance in the initial battle, and he wanted to save his strength for the real confrontation.

The battle that followed was bloody. Jay Seena was eventually defeated and forced to flee from the battlefield. Over 90% of his army had been destroyed, and over five thousand enemy corpses littered the field. Muslim losses, on the other hand, were minor. Historical reports suggest a count as low as a hundred martyrs in that battle.

The Decisive Battle

The Ramadan moon for the year 93 AH had been sighted. Raja Dahir was waiting for a decisive battle with the Muslims, camped somewhere in Aror. He had waited particularly for the month of Ramadan to initiate the battle, because the lack of food and the intensity of heat would weaken the Muslim fighters and throw them off their game. His battle strategy also focused on spreading the Muslims thin and exhausting them. He wanted to send in his various companies at different times so that as the Muslims tired, refreshed soldiers would attack them and force them on the defensive once more.

When Raja Dahir's army assembled in front of the Muslims, it presented a glorious, impressive sight. Raja Dahir was accompanied by an army of 40,000 men, including a big faction of warriors known for their prowess in battle. His army also involved 27 dangerous elephants, with daggers tied to their trunks and their bodies protected by armour. A stately ceremony took place as Raja Dahir personally mounted the most impressive elephant, with the priests singing their holy songs. Finally, Raja Dahir emerged under the protection of ten thousand warriors riding on horses, dressed completely in armour and their faces protected by helmets of iron.

With fifteen thousand men on his right and as many on his left, Raja Dahir addressed his men. He encouraged them to forget the past victories of the Muslims, and to banish any awe they may feel for the opposing army. In the end, he said with great passion,

“Islam will not enter Sindh as long as I draw breath. If we do not stop this religion here, it will spread throughout this country, and its impurity will sweep our children away with it.”

As soon as Muhammad bin Qasim was informed of the assembly of Raja Dahir’s armies, he ordered the Muslim army to prepare immediately. Instead of having his men spread out to meet all of Raja Dahir’s army as the raja had wanted, he instead had them gather close to the enemy’s center. The fighting continued for eight long days. The enemy had hoped to spread the Muslims out, to force them to ride around the battlefield repeatedly to exhaust them, but the fighting instead remained as short, bloody battles. To combat the elephants, Muslim archers would send a volley of fiery arrows. The fire would hit the elephant, and it would yell in distress, turning around to run back, crushing its own army in its wake.

On the ninth day, Raja Dahir lost what remained of his patience. He wanted to end this war soon, and on his terms. He suspended the careful strategy he had honed and instead decided to confront the Muslims openly. That day was one of the bloodiest yet, and Muhammad bin Qasim’s second in command Mahraz bin Thabit was martyred.

On the 10th of Ramadan, 93 AH (circa 711-712 CE), the day of Sindh’s decisive battle dawned. The battle between right and wrong had entered its final stages. Raja Dahir came forth on his elephant with an uncanny sort of magnificence. His son Jay Seena accompanied him. On the other hand, the Muslims were standing ready to face an army five times their size, fasting and invoking God, obedient to their commander.

As the battle started, Raja Dahir ordered a straightforward attack on the Muslims instead of trying some tactic, believing that his greater numbers and elephants would easily ensure success. Within a couple of hours, he had realized that the factors he had relied on would be no guarantee of victory. To stop the backward retreat of his army, he decided to enter the battlefield personally, accompanied by a reserve of his men who had not yet been tired out by fighting. His instincts were right, and his presence lent courage to his men, who stopped retreating and launched an almighty wave of attack. The Muslim soldiers began to fall instead, and Raja Dahir's soldiers began gaining ground. The elephants were specially advancing rapidly, changing the face of the battlefield for the worse. At this crucial moment, God sent help in the form of Moko who had just arrived with reinforcements. Muhammad kept a hold of his nerves, and ordered that the cannons be fired at the elephants.

Before this moment, cannons were almost never used in open battle. As the elephants were hit by heavy stones, their enraged trumpeting shook the earth. That, accompanied by the blasts from the cannons, the screams from the injured and dying, the clashing of the swords and the dust from the hooves of the horses created such a scene as would make the bravest man tremble. In the chaos, some Muslim soldiers informed Muhammad that the stones being fired at the elephants were hurting Muslim soldiers as well. Muhammad thus ordered fiery arrows to once again be fired at the elephants instead of the stones, but the stones had done their work. The majority of the elephants, now panicked and hurt, turned around and stampeded back, trampling on their own army in the process. The retreat of the elephants struck fear and terror in the hearts of the soldiers, demoralising them once more.

As Raja Dahir saw the tide turn once more in favor of the Muslims, he became crazed. He rode his elephant into the very

center of the battlefield, demonstrating great skill and valour as he cut down his enemies with fervour. A company of Muslim soldiers had been stalking the raja for a while without much success. Now they began to make their way towards him, firing fiery arrows directly at the elephant. One such arrow landed on the seat on top of the elephant which was made of silk and caught fire immediately. Panicking, the elephant stampeded towards the nearest lake to put out the fire and began to pour water on itself. This had the effect of isolating Raja Dahir from the protection of his army. Realizing his position, he jumped from the back of the elephant and began to swim across the lake.

He had not gone far when the Muslim company in search of him spotted him. Despite being surrounded, he continued to fight them alone until the soldier Qasim bin Tha'laba of the tribe Bani Tay lunged for a strike at his throat which hit home, and he died.

Soon after Raja Dahir disappeared from the battlefield, the fighting ended. When the 11th of Ramadan dawned, it brought with itself the good tidings of victory for the Muslims. Raja Dahir's remaining army had fled and was attempting to take refuge in the castle of Aror, but they were ultimately unsuccessful. Muhammad bin Qasim had been smart enough to instruct some of his own men to flee alongside the retreating army to prevent him having to lay siege to another castle. Raja Dahir's corpse was identified by a priest who had taken advantage of the chaos of the battle to hurriedly bury him in muddy ground. He now wanted to bargain for his life in return for indicating the location of the dead king. The king's head was cut off as a lesson against arrogance, and it was sent along with the spoils of war to Hajjaj along with the news of the great victory.

When the messenger arrived with all the details of the victory, Hajjaj's happiness was palpable. Along with a long letter, he sent all the spoils to the court of the Caliph to be entered into the treasury. At one end, Muslims were thanking God for the victory He had given them and spending their days in worship as Ramadan demands. On the other end, Raja Dahir's son Jay Seena was in Brahmanabad, writing to all his relatives and to the captains of the guards, reminding them of their duty and honor. The big battle of Sindh had been won, but the last embers of the opposition still burned, ready to spark into flame.

The Conquest of Behror and Dehlila

It was important to conquer the castle of Behror before Brahmanabad could be attacked. The castle contained a large amount of soldiers along with the men who had fled from the earlier battle. As the Muslims laid siege to the castle, the soldiers inside put up a valiant defense. Whatever tactic was used to defeat them, they found a way around it and kept up the defense. Finally, Muhammad ordered that the cannons should be fired at nighttime, and fiery arrows should be fired inside the city walls. Hindus are famously superstitious, believing in signs and omens. Seeing glowing fireballs coming their way in the darkness of the night sowed confusion and terror, and the rumour spread that the Muslims were using magic to set fire to the houses in the city.

Meanwhile one of the arrows landed in the dry hay kept for the army horses. The hay caught fire at once, and soon the castle was filled with thick, dark smoke. The scene caused chaos and panic, and no one seemed to know what to do. Many of the soldiers appointed at the castle battlements disappeared, making the task much easier for the Muslims. Muhammad summoned the tunnel diggers at once, and soon a large gap in the castle walls had been created. The Muslim soldiers easily subdued the frightened castle guards and opened the gates. The two month

siege had ended, and there were no major obstacles left in the path of the Muslims. Most of the soldiers had lost hope, but there were some pockets of resistance left, soldiers fighting a losing war. The 16,000 large army had soon dwindled to nothing, with some of the soldiers escaping to Brahmanabad. The Muslims had won a large victory.

After arranging the administrative affairs of Behror, Muhammad set his sights on the castle of Dehlilah. The castle was filled with army soldiers; all the civilian population had abandoned their houses. After a siege that lasted around two months, peppered with short skirmishes, the soldiers in the castle surrendered. They put away their arms and weaponry, donned civilian clothing, and walked out of the castle chanting mournful poetry. The Muslim army took over the castle and populated it once more.

At this occasion, Raja Dahir's wise advisor Si Sakar demonstrated his allegiance to his new rulers, and according to one historical narration, presented the Arab women and children who had been held captive elsewhere all these months. Muhammad in turn welcomed him with respect and dignity, and began to value him for his beneficial advice in matters of strategy and his extensive knowledge of local affairs.

Brahmanabad – A Difficult Conflict

An army of 40,000 bloodthirsty men awaited the Muslims inside Brahmanabad. Jay Seena had gathered almost all remaining Hindu resistance in Sindh within this stronghold, and the numbers grew everyday. When the Muslim army reached Brahmanabad under the command of Muhammad bin Qasim, they found that they had to fight on two fronts. Outside the castle, Jay Seena's army attacked the Muslim camps at night and destroyed their supply lines and food stores, leading to a loss of life and resources. On the other hand, the army shut up inside the castle would burst out unexpectedly and attack the

Muslims in a short battle before retreating back inside. The Muslims were not faring too well against this two-pronged assault, so with the advice of Moko, Muhammad sent a portion of his army to confront Jay Seena's army directly. Jay Seena panicked at the notion of a full-scale battle. He appointed his brother as regent in his place, and escaped towards Kashmir.

Having dealt with Jay Seena outside the castle, Muhammad now directed his attention towards the army locked inside the castle. As the siege lengthened, those inside the city walls became restless and anxious. It is not easy to arrange for food and supplies for such a large city when supply lines are cut off, and the people became impatient with the stand off. Muhammad on the other hand sent some messages threatening to begin shelling the castle if it was not soon handed over. Usually Muhammad used the cannons as a last resort because they increased the risk of civilian casualties, but they made for effective threats.

In the end, some of the soldiers inside the castle conspired with some of the priests and the local people, deciding to send the Muslims a secret offer of truce, and to facilitate their entry into the castle to avoid prolonging the tense stand off. Thus one day, when a company of soldiers had gone out as usual to engage in a skirmish with the surrounding Muslim army, these soldiers participated as well. When returning back into the castle, they prevented the castle guards from closing the gates, which gave the Muslim soldiers the opportunity they had been waiting for. Immediately they entered the castle as a flood, sparking chaos and panic within the city. Muhammad did not try to stop the fleeing soldiers from escaping. Time had shown that defeated, escaped soldiers usually ended up lowering the morale of whatever company of soldiers that they joined.

Amidst all the chaos, the leader Raja Gopi fled towards Aror, while the Muslims captured Raja Dahir's favorite wife, Rani

Laadhi. She was treated with both courtesy and respect during her time in captivity. Until now, she had been the source of the high morale of the army, and she was particularly talented at inspiring them to heights of passionate anger against the Muslims. Now that she encountered these 'barbaric' Muslims herself and experienced their courtesy and manners directed towards her, she agreed to cooperate with them. According to some narrations, Muhammad bin Qasim is thought to have married her himself, but these narrations are not historically reliable. It is certainly possible, but it is more likely that as in many stories about legends, this detail was fabricated to titillate the masses and add colour and excitement into the story of Muhammad's life.

Muhammad granted refuge to the residents of Brahmanabad. A tax (*jizya*) on the citizens was introduced in exchange for the protection of the Muslim army. Most leaders and officials were allowed to retain their positions with the explicit instructions not to oppress or exploit the people. Muhammad's next destination was Aror. This was the last major stronghold of the enemy, and it was time to conquer it.

Dealing with the Jaats

Before Muhammad could lay siege to Aror, he encountered two nations along the way with whom it was very difficult to deal. The people of the tribes of Samah and Lakha were widely considered to be wild and savage. Their occupation was robbery and looting. Raja Dahir had often used them to his advantage, but after being angered at one occasion, he had decreed a strict punishment. The people of the tribe were not allowed to dress whatever way they pleased, nor could they cover their heads or feet. They were allowed to cover their body with a single sheet or blanket, and that's it. They weren't even allowed to saddle their horses. In addition, they were strictly commanded to keep to their piece of land, so that if someone had to venture out of

the city they had to be accompanied by a dog so they could be recognized.

Their delegation presented themselves to Muhammad bin Qasim in order to swear allegiance, singing and playing to a strange tune. Rather bewildered on how to proceed, Muhammad conferred with Hajjaj before coming to a decision. He neither granted them a full pardon, nor did he deal with them harshly. The locals had repeatedly told him that these tribal people were very unreliable and untrustworthy, and that their criminal factions were not in any one's control. Muhammad bin Qasim, however, did not like the idea of collective punishment for the whole tribe because of the crimes of a group of people. He allowed them to maintain their leaders, and he repealed the decree that had forbidden them from wearing what clothes they chose to wear. He made it clear that they would have to prove that they were indeed worthy of being treated with respect and dignity. The leaders of the Jaats were very much impressed by Muhammad and his treatment of them. They solemnly swore to uphold their vows and promises and left to go back to their people.

The Conquest of Aror

Aror's situation was different from the rest. Geographically speaking, it was close to the bank of the Indus River and was a lush green, beautiful place. Its ruins still exist, almost four miles near the city of Rohri. The priests in the city had conspired with Raja Dahir's son Gopi and planned to spread the rumor that Raja Dahir was actually alive, and would arrive soon with a large army to vanquish the Muslims. Raja Dahir's wife Rani Maai was in the castle as well, and she was in on the plan. Thus the scheme was implemented with great care. Raja Dahir's impending arrival was the talk of the day, and the people were high-spirited and determined as they awaited the battle.

Muhammad had been here a month, and he had come to the conclusion that the people of the castle would not yield as long as they believed Raja Dahir to still be alive. He did not want to have a direct, prolonged battle with the denizens of the castle because he knew it would be bloody and would result in an unnecessary loss of life. Thus he summoned Rani Laadhi who was in the custody of Muslims, and told her that he intends to fire his cannons towards the castle. If she wished to save the lives of her people, she should go near the castle walls and identify herself, and announce to the people that Raja Dahir has indeed died. Rani Laadhi did as she was instructed, but the people had placed such hopes in the thought of Raja Dahir's impending arrival that they were reluctant to believe her, and cursed her instead for appearing to have switched sides.

Around this time, a strange event occurred which sowed doubt in the hearts of the people of Aror. The most famous 'witch' Jogni who lived in the area appeared one morning in an extraordinary manner, and began predicting the victory of the Muslims. She had been predicting it ever since Muslims had first entered Sindh, but her prophecies had mostly been dismissed as ramblings. Now that that victory looked a lot more plausible, alongside her sudden appearance, the people in the castle became nervous and frightened. Rani Laadhi's assurances of Raja Dahir's death became much more believable, and they began to wonder why Raja Dahir hadn't yet arrived with reinforcements if he was still alive. Rumours flew through the city like wildfire. Gopi sensed that the common people and the army officials all seem to have lost hope of success, so he decided to cut his losses and run. When Muhammad heard that Gopi had escaped, he ordered his army to cry '*Allahu Akbar!*' as a psychological tactic. Sure enough, Gopi's escape followed by the heart-stopping cries of the Muslim army proclaiming God's greatness were too much for the people. They opened the castle gates and conveyed their desire for a truce.

Muhammad bin Qasim granted safety to the residents of Aror. He treated them with compassion and respect, promising that their temples would remain untouched. The people were absolutely astonished at the conduct of the Muslim army. They could not fathom a victorious army being so unconcerned with the wealth of the common people, nor an army that did not despoil their wives and daughters, nor one that did not even demand free hay for their horses. The Muslims, in this case, were truly unique.

Rani Maai was Raja Dahir's wife and also his biological sister. Fortunetellers had predicted that her husband would overthrow Raja Dahir's throne, so he had avoided that by committing a heinous sin: he married her. Rani Maai took the defeat very hard, and she was unable to continue living. Along with her handmaidens, she committed suicide.

Not all of Raja Dahir's relatives reacted that way. His cousin Raja Kaksa was the ruler of Bhaatiya. Witnessing how the Muslims conducted themselves, he was sufficiently impressed by them that he agreed to give them his allegiance. Muhammad appointed him as his representative in the area and retained him as the leader of Bhaatiya.

The Other Conquests

Muhammad next headed to Iskalandar, where a relatively large army had amassed. For around a week they resisted strongly, but after they had lost over 4,000 men and the castle was under constant fire from the cannons, the ruler Raja Sehra escaped along with the top priests and the treasures. Those left in the castle surrendered their arms and waved the flag of peace.

The next destination of the Muslims was Sukka, near the city of Multan. The army of Sukka did not fight from behind castle walls. After a long day of bloody battle, the army would retreat to the castle after sunset. The Muslim casualty count was rising.

Three of Muhammad's brave generals and 17 army officials had been martyred. Greatly grieved, he sent repeated messages to the castle, asking them to lay down arms. After seventeen days of useless fighting had passed without result, he exclaimed in a fit of passionate anger, "I will obliterate this city!"

As it happened, the enemy's attack was weak the very next day. Muslims took advantage of this, pushing the army back into the castle and entering the castle gates themselves. The army soon surrendered themselves. The reason behind their weakness was that the ruler of the castle, Bhajra, had escaped with his family last night. Muhammad, for the first time since he had entered Sindh, dealt harshly with a city. The population was imprisoned, and the structure of the castle was reduced to rubble.

Multan is Conquered

Now Muhammad was faced with the great city of Multan, across the river Chenab. At the time, a lot of current day Punjab was actually included in Sindh. The ruler of Multan was Raja Korsiya (Raja Koryasingh according to some narrations), who was Raja Dahir's nephew. The tired Muslim army camped a short distance away from the castle, filled with invigorated and revenge-hungry men. Enemy troops would ride out of the castle, launch a fast attack, and return as quickly as they had arrived. The situation went on for around two months, with both sides suffering heavy losses. Muslims were at a disadvantage because their supplies had run out, until they were forced to slaughter the pack animals to consume as food. The Muslim soldiers showed great patience, but soon matters had come to starvation.

A Multani prisoner, sick of hunger, betrayed his people on the condition of being given more food and gave the Muslims some information that could prove very useful. He told them the location of a lake that supplied water to the castle. The Muslims found this lake, and cut off the route from the castle to the

water. This created a very odd dilemma: the Muslims were hungry and the Multanis were thirsty. In this battle between hunger and thirst, the Muslims captured a man who was trying to escape from the castle. After being arrested, he offered to tell them a valuable secret if the Muslims agreed to open the water supply once more. The secret was that the ruler of the castle had fled, and Bhajra was leading the army. He also indicated to them a portion of the castle walls that was weaker than the rest. Muslims fired cannons targeting that particular portion of the castle walls and created a huge opening in the castle's defenses. The people of the city surrendered, and as promised, Muhammad re-opened the water supply.

The conquest of Multan sealed the Muslims' victory over the whole area. Muslims also found huge amounts of treasure from Multan. According to one narration, one of the priests told the Muslims the address of the location of an ancient treasure, while according to another tradition, the biggest source of the spoils was a Buddhist center with a secret stockpiling of gold. After Muhammad finished arranging the administrative affairs of the city, he wrote a detailed letter to Hajjaj as usual, describing the details of the battle and the wealth that had been found. He also wrote that Hajjaj had now fulfilled the promise that he had made to the Caliph a while ago: that he would send back twice the cost of the campaign to the royal treasury as spoils of the war.

After receiving this letter, Hajjaj did not stay alive for too long. Even after news of his death reached Muhammad, he did not stop his efforts. He first won the allegiance of Sorath, then Khera, then defeated Raja Dohar of Kairaj in a great battle. He was now ruler of modern day Sindh, a big part of modern Punjab, and some areas of Kashmir. Around this time, Caliph Walid passed away as well, and his brother Suleiman bin Abdul Malik became the new Caliph of the Muslim nation. In the month of Jamadi us Sani, in the year 96 AH, Muhammad was

fully absorbed in his third year of the campaign when a messenger from the new Caliph reached him with a message.

A Glorious Beginning, A Tragic End

The message said that the new Caliph removed Muhammad bin Qasim from his position as the head of the Muslim army, and commanded him to surrender to arrest. The background of such an order was that Caliph Suleiman had harboured a severe resentment against Hajjaj. Hajjaj had advised Caliph Walid to appoint his son Abdul Aziz as the heir to the caliphate instead of his brother Suleiman. In addition, Hajjaj was in many ways an unlikeable man, and his harshness and cruelty towards people was common knowledge. Suleiman bore such hatred for Hajjaj that as soon as he had assumed the mantle of leadership, he ordered the unseating, arresting, and summoning to Damascus of all Hajjaj's relatives or leaders that he had personally chosen and advanced in his lifetime.

When Muhammad was made aware of the changes in the political climate and given the message, he summoned his closest companions and advisors to inform them of the Caliph's decision. His advisors recommended that he should refuse the summons. The Caliph's intentions appeared dangerous and malicious, and Muhammad was the ruler of a large area of India. He was very popular and beloved, not only amongst the Muslim army but also by the local population. If he did not obey the summons and the order for his arrest, the Caliph would be powerless to force him, and he would be safe. Muhammad listened to their advice, and his reply to them would go down in history as proof of his character, principles, and his love for the unity of the Muslim nation. He said,

"If I begin such a tradition of declaring independence, there are many similar places ruled by generals like me. They too will declare autonomy over the areas they have conquered. The Islamic empire will shatter into bits and pieces."

Despite his determined statement and clear resolve, his companions insisted that he should reconsider his opinion and not leave India. Muhammad, however, surrendered himself to arrest, saying,

“The caliphate is the legacy left by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. I cannot disobey him.”

Muhammad bin Qasim, the conqueror of Sindh and indisputably one of the greatest generals in Islamic history, was given woollen clothes to wear, cuffs around his wrists and manacles around his ankles. He was taken to Damascus as a prisoner, where he was kept captive and given over to people whose relatives had suffered by Hajjaj’s hand. He was made the victim of revenge for crimes he had not even committed, and the torture he faced was too damaging to his body. Soon his health took a turn for the very worst. In the last moments of his life, he murmured, “Woe to the passing of time - how treacherous it is to honourable men.”

The honourable man who did not condone torture even for a different people, even for prisoners of war, passed away an innocent recipient of that same torture by his own people. Muhammad left the world after a short yet beautiful life, but the generations of Muslims who have lived in the subcontinent from then till now owe him a heavy debt of gratitude that they will never be able to repay.

His Praiseworthy Character and Personal Traits

Historians agree that Muhammad was a courageous, wise and watchful commander. In his personal life, he was considered to be pious, soft-spoken and mature by those who knew him. He was well loved by those under his command, but also by the people of the lands that he conquered. He rose from Debal like a storm which swept away in its wake Multan, Gujrat, Kaathiawar, and the surrounding areas, leaving Raja Dahir and

his arrogance in the dust left in his wake. His determination to move forward, to advance, to conquer was great, and if he had had the chance, he may have succeeded in flowing the banner of Islam over all of India.

He cared not about court politics, and the machinations and manipulations of politicians. He was a soldier at heart, and he was most content when he was roaming the deserts, the mountains, and the forests in his military clothing, camping in flimsy tents in all sorts of weather. He had the mind of an intelligent warrior as well, which is why he knew to decide on his strategy after observing the enemy' strengths, weaknesses, and chosen tactics. This is how he had very quickly discovered the superstitious nature of the Hindu nature. Knowing that winning the psychological war is winning half the battle, and keeping in mind the superstitions of the Hindu people and their reverence for their idols, he had attacked the temple at Debal directly and won the city in one fell swoop.

Another achievement of his was the almost complete lack of rebellion in his conquered areas. Some revolt is inevitable, but looking at the quickness of his conquests and the difference between the Hindu and the Arab nations, a much greater scale of rebellion may have been expected. One reason for this was that he always treated the common people with kindness and compassion, while another was his conciliatory nature. The leaders who agreed to a truce were welcomed and treated with the utmost respect, and he retained them in their positions and broke bread with them. Thus those who had been passionate enemies two days ago would find themselves becoming his friends and supporters. Be it Moko, his brother Rasil, Raja Kaksa of Bhaatiya, or Raja Dahir's advisor Sisakar, all admired and were impressed by Muhammad's compassion and his adherence to his word.

Due to his temperament, his skill in arranging the administration of an area, and his willingness to take advice from the local leaders, Muhammad established within two years the foundation for a system of justice which satisfied everyone. Theft, robbery and attacks fell to an all time low, and justice and equality were the order of the day. The criminal factions of the Jaat people were reigned in, but they were also given back their self-respect and dignity, and included once more into mainstream society. Muhammad Ishaaq Bhatti writes in his book "*Barresagheer mein Islam key Awwaleen Nuqoosh*":

"Muhammad's arrest and subsequent death was a great tragedy of our history. Those in India and Sindh felt it very deeply, and they shed a great many tears at the loss of such a man. In the city of Khera in Gujrat, a statue of his likeness was created and installed in the city center – an indication of his being a great man and a just ruler. Bilazri has written in his report of history that 'the people of India cried at the death of Muhammad bin Qasim, and an artistic memorial for him was established in Kairaj (Khera).'"

Muhammad's popularity within the conquered populace is perhaps his most unique trait. The real reason behind it was that unlike most conquerers, he considered human life to be undeniably precious. He tried his hardest to arrange matters so that he would not have to fire cannons indiscriminately at castle walls because of the risk to the lives of non-combatants. In almost all his battles, he only ever punished the responsible officials and high-ranking generals after he had won a victory. He was strongly against the killing of merchants, farmers, and skilled workers. He used to say that it was these people who kept the wheel of society turning – if they were to be killed, the lives of the citizens would denigrate into chaos. His soldiers were specifically and strongly ordered to only kill or capture the other soldiers when winning, and to not engage with the

women, children, or unarmed civilians. There was strict punishment decreed for whoever disobeyed this vital order.

It would have been impossible for the people to observe Muhammad and not be awed by his character. They knew very well from history and from experience that when an area is conquered by an invading army, the conquerors imposed their religion upon the masses, even forcing conversions. They knew that the invaders preyed upon the women, that they robbed the common man of his wealth by confiscating and by establishing crippling taxes. This new Muslim army, headed by their young, pious commander were almost like divine creatures in how much they differed from a typical army of conquerors. Muhammad not only refrained from treating the people harshly, but he was often kinder and more just than their frequently oppressive local rulers. Charmed by his superior treatment of them, they would willingly offer their cooperation and services up to him. When a mosque was being constructed in Neroon, the local people and even the Hindu soldiers voluntarily participated in the construction process. In this, Muhammad was decidedly different from his uncle Hajjaj. Hajjaj was not at all impressed by Muhammad's tendency towards compassion and self-sacrifice. He frequently reprimanded him for his unnecessary kindness towards the people which he viewed as potentially harmful in the long run. Before Muhammad's confrontation with Raja Dahir, Hajjaj sent him a harshly-worded letter, saying,

"I do not like your way of giving refuge to the enemy and pardoning his life. If there is enmity between you, there should be no pardon. You consider the innocent and the sinners to be the same, and your enemy will use it as your weakness."

Muhammad understood this point very well, but he did not believe in crossing lines just to take revenge from his enemies. If someone's treachery was proven, however, he was

unforgiving. Once when some local people were presented to him by his subordinate commander Zakwan bin Alwan who were willing to sign onto his army, he addressed them in these words,

“I want to make one thing very clear. Change your religion or not, but do not ever change your loyalties again. If you go into the battlefield, and you try to switch sides, your only punishment will be death. Think upon it now - you will have to fight your own people, those who follow your own religion. If you cannot do it, return home now.”

Muhammad embodied all the qualities that a good army commander should possess. He was always alert and attentive, never growing complacent. He slept very little, and he had given standing orders that if any important news arrived, he was to be informed immediately, without any concern for his sleep or exhaustion. While the army’s horses had fallen ill and Muhammad was in a constant state of restlessness, fearing a surprise attack by Raja Dahir, he would mount a horse at night and ride for miles in the darkness, alert and watchful. His attentiveness meant that not only did the enemy fail to catch him unawares, but he himself was often aware of what the enemy was planning before time. His friend Sufyan Saqfi was in charge of intelligence, and he kept Muhammad updated constantly about what was going on, in the light of which Muhammad constantly modified and improved his strategy and battle plans.

Like any great leader, Muhammad practiced what he preached before he expected any of his supporters to follow him. If he encouraged them to show courage and bravery in battle, he was the first to demonstrate valour during the fighting, unlike the Hindu leaders who usually fled when they found the danger to be too great. During the fight for Behror, Muhammad was fighting and shouting instructions to his men when an arrow

flew by so close that it almost grazed his skin. Muhammad ignored it completely, continuing to yell commands and directing the soldiers. One of his soldiers approached him quickly, grabbing the reigns of his horse and rushed the horse away from the range of the arrows. Muhammad tried to grab his reigns back, but did not succeed. Having led his commander out of immediate danger, the soldier once more galloped towards the fighting. In the blink of an eye, he was hit by an arrow and fell off his horse. Witnessing his fall, Muhammad reached him to offer his aid, but the soldier was breathing his last. The dying man choked out,

"Stay alive, Muhammad bin Qasim. If you cease to exist, this will all be for naught."

It was a sign of the great love that his men bore him that they considered his life more valuable than theirs, and for him to remain alive was a victory beyond what wealth and lands could offer. As for Muhammad himself, he had entrusted his life wholly to God. He was often busy with prayers and worship even in the middle of frantic battle preparations and frequent strategy meetings. When he led his army in congregational prayers, the local Hindus would often gather around to watch the tableau they created. Despite his young age, he understood very well that the sword could be used to bring about political change by force, but that changing the hearts of people could only take place if they had the opportunity to witness the lifestyle Islam taught its followers.

He laid the foundation of a mosque in every area that he conquered. Being so close to God and remembering Him constantly, he possessed a certain spiritual strength that occasionally manifested for others to see. When Muhammad and the army had reached the area of Balhar, the water ran out and the soldiers were discomfited by the sharp thirst that they were forced to suffer. When the problem became severe, the

Muslim army offered a prayer (*salat ul istisqaa'*) behind Muhammad. After the prayer, Muhammad raised his hands and asked God for help, his words so eloquent that they moved most of the men to tears. A brief while later, dark clouds overtook the army, and it rained heavily, Muhammad's plea having been answered.

Hajjaj was above Muhammad in the chain of command, and Muhammad answered to him in regards to his army and exploits. Sitting thousands of miles away, he had nevertheless kept a large amount of control in his hands and made all the big decisions. Despite Hajjaj being a touchy man who could turn against others at the smallest provocation, Muhammad kept him placated and never provided an occasion for complaint. After every victory, he faithfully and responsibly sent the exact amount of booty agreed upon. The most ancient and reliable historical text about the history of Sindh, the 'Chuchnama', describes in detail the letters that Hajjaj had written to Muhammad on various occasions. Although they are mostly written in a paternal and approving tone, there are several occasions where he grows commanding, even harshly reprimanding. Muhammad did not grow arrogant or egotistic even after the numerous victories he had won or the glory he had achieved for his nation. He remained intensely loyal to the caliphate, even when Caliph Suleiman ordered his arrest without giving an excuse and for no reason other than an enmity against another person. Muhammad bin Qasim, whom not a single ruler, raja, or commander of Sindh had been able to defeat or intimidate, willingly shackled his wrists at his Caliph's command. Despite having the power and authority, he refused to deny the order of the Caliph of the time.

A long while after Muhammad had left, his soldiers and his conquered people remembered the courageous and kind-hearted conqueror who had won their hearts. A short while after his arrest, chaos spread through the lands he had conquered. The

rajas began to rebel and disobey, and it took quite a while to subdue them all again. Muhammad bin Qasim was a hero, not just of the Indians of the time who had been pulled towards Islam by the force of his personality, but also every Muslim who is born on that land till the Day of Judgment. A large part of modern day Pakistan came under the shade of Islam due to his efforts and endeavours. May God bless him, pardon his mistakes, and grant him the highest palaces in Paradise.

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Foreword

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

Any modern scholar of the Hadith sciences knows well the name of Nasiruddin Albani. Of modern Hadith scholars, Shaikh Albani stands out as a giant figure whose massive accomplishments seem both inspiring and unreal. Born in 1914 and homeschooled, it is astonishing to follow his transformation from a watchmaker and a casual student of Islamic sciences to a dedicated expert in Hadith. He had no degree or diploma from any of the renowned universities, and yet senior lecturers would seek his opinion and advice on Hadith matters.

His main achievement, one that took most of his life to complete, was the rigorous authentication, classification and verification of almost the entire collection of Ahadith compiled by the early scholars. The Hadith that Albani declares authentic carries a different weight.

Shaikh Albani was not just an academic scholar; he took up the banner of reviving the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW), removing innovations in religion and purifying it, and his message struck a chord in the hearts of thousands. His life was not always peaceful or easy, but he stood firm and showed the Muslims that such a life can be led even in modern times. His story is one truly worth reading and learning from.

I would like to thank Naima Sohaib for inspiring me with her reverence for Muslim heroes which is reflected in her writings, and Sohaib Umar for editing this translation. May Allah SWT accept our efforts.

Rida Sohaib

Nasiruddin Albani

The Most Prominent Hadith Scholar of the Modern Era

Who was Nasiruddin Albani?

His name was Muhammad Nasiruddin, his *kuniat* (nickname) was Abu Abdul Rahman, and his title was Albani. His lineage is as follows: Muhammad Nasiruddin bin Nuh Najati bin Adam.

He belonged to the people of Arnaut, who had migrated from Syria and settled in Albania after the Ottomans conquered it. Much later, Nasiruddin's family travelled back to Syria and resettled there.

Birth

Muhammad Nasiruddin was born in 1332 AH (1914 CE) in the city of Shkodër, which was then the capital of Albania.

Early Life

Muhammad Nasiruddin was born in a poor family. His father Nuh Najati was a scholar, although he earned his daily bread through his work as a watchmaker. He had graduated from the religious institutes in Istanbul (Constantinople) and taught students in Shkodër who sought him out to benefit from his knowledge and his company.

After Albania gained its independence from the Ottoman caliphate in 1911, it formed its own national government in 1920 with the help of various European powers. Ahmet Zogu assumed the mantle of presidency, and under the influence of the Europeans followed in the footsteps of Kamal Ataturk, trying to secularize the country. A governmental decree to adopt the western dress, language and lifestyle was issued. For men,

praying in the mosques and for women, wearing a headscarf in public became increasingly difficult. The call to prayer was called out in the Albanian language instead of in Arabic. The religious people of Albania could foresee nothing but difficulties in the days ahead. Many families decided to leave Albania and migrate somewhere more welcoming, where they would be able to preserve their faith and the legacy of the religion which they were certain would slowly fade if they stayed in Albania. Nasiruddin's father was one of those who emigrated from Albania, and he settled in the city of Damascus in Syria.

Nasiruddin was only nine when his family arrived in Damascus. His formal schooling began here as he entered Jamiat ul As'aaf al-Khairi where most of the immigrant children studied. Nasiruddin's father, unsatisfied with the academic standards of the *madrassah*, switched him to another institute. Still he did not get the desired results. He then decided to homeschool his son, teaching him the Quran, the art of its recitation (*tajweed*), Arabic and jurisprudence. Also, he made his son memorize the entire Quran.

As Nasiruddin's father belonged to the Hanafi school of thought, he taught him the famous books belonging to this school. Nasiruddin took the opportunity of spending time with his father's friend Shaikh Muhammad Saeed Burhani. He also attended the lectures of Damascus' famous scholar Muhammad Bahjat al-Bitar. Nasiruddin's extraordinary memory, intellect and literary interest soon led him to significantly elevate his level of knowledge. His command of the Arabic language grew as well, so much so that his example would be given to the Arab children of the community. He read children's books and fables with great interest. The subject of history in particular caught his attention. His love for reading taught him the meaning of life and its realities. He says, "In my childhood, I read all kinds

of books – those that deserved to be read and others which were not worthy of reading."

In his free time, he began to learn carpentry and then joined his father's trade (i.e. watchmaking). Working as a watchmaker had the major benefit of providing Nasiruddin with a lot of spare time, most of which he spent in the Al-Zahiriya Library. The quiet atmosphere of the library and the ocean of books was ambrosia to Nasiruddin. He began to explore the Hadith sciences in particular, reading books from various schools of thought, not just the Hanafi one. The library had an enormous collection of Hadith books. It had been founded in the seventh century AH by the Mamluk Sultan Rukn al-Din al-Zahir Baibars. Since then, many famous scholars of Islam, including Imam Ibn Taimiyyah, Ibn Kathir, Imam Nawawi and Imam al-Dhahabi, had benefited from the library and also gifted copies of their own works to add to the collection.

Along with the library, Nasiruddin also began to visit bookstores to buy books belonging to various schools of thought. He began to enjoy investigating and researching sources. In this context, Abu al-Hasan Abdul Khaliq in his book "Muhammad Nasiruddin Albani" quotes Nasiruddin about an incident that has some significance for his later life:

"One day I found an issue of the magazine 'Al-Manar' in a pile of books belonging to a book merchant, and I bought it from him. In the magazine I found an essay written by Muhammad Rashid Rida in which he had written a literary criticism of Imam Ghazali's book "The Revival of the Religious Sciences". This was the first time I had ever read such a masterpiece criticism of a work, and it awakened in me a desire to read the book which had sparked such excellent critical debate. Thus I attempted to rent the original book, abridged by Allama Iraqi, since I could not afford to buy it. When I read the book, the high quality work of Allama Iraqi and the great literary value of

his summarization of the original book captured my imagination. I resolved to make a copy or summary of the book for myself. I worked very hard on it and came up with a suitable approach to investigate the information and copy it down securely. I think the diligence and dedication with which I examined the book and solved its complications in order to make a coherent summary contributed greatly to set me on my path. I had to refer to a vast number of books, including dictionaries, books on eloquence and books on weak Ahadith in order to understand the difficult sentences and statements that I came across during my summarization."

A Love of the Hadith Sciences

By the age of 20, Nasiruddin's attention had become focused on the Hadith sciences. His father, seeing the number of books Nasiruddin would read as a routine and the level of research he carried out while comparing various schools of thought, grew worried and anxious. A fundamental difference of approach emerged between the father and the son. Nasiruddin's father strongly believed that it was better to follow one school of thought fully (*taqleed*) rather than researching each jurisprudential matter by oneself, since that was more likely to lead one astray. Nasiruddin, however, was equally strongly opposed to this way of thinking. As the tension escalated, Nasiruddin's father said to him one day in anger, "Either follow the Hanafi school of thought properly, or leave the house." Nasiruddin, unwilling to back down from his opinion, chose to move out. He began attending the lectures of various scholars of Hadith. He went to Aleppo to benefit from the Hadith scholar Shaikh Ragheb al-Tabbakh, who gave Nasiruddin the permission to narrate Ahadith from him.

Meanwhile Nasiruddin's father regretted his treatment of his son and called Nasiruddin back home. Upon his return Nasiruddin noted a change in his father's behavior whereby he

would make an effort to listen to and appreciate his son, even asking him at times about the authenticity of certain narrations. Nasiruddin's growing expertise on the subject made it difficult to reject him offhand, because he could cite not only other scholars but also his own personal research of the various sources and their reliability.

Soon Nasiruddin married, and the increased responsibility to provide for his family led him to spend around three hours a day as watchmaker. This was enough to maintain a basic, low-income lifestyle for himself and his family, and the rest of his time was spent in scholarly pursuits as usual. Nasiruddin's life now revolved mainly around his beloved books, of which books of Hadith were particularly dear to him. He describes this phase of his life in these words:

"Once I bought a piece of land as it was cheap, and began to build a house and a shop on it. This land was rather far from the Al-Zahiriya library which I frequented daily, so I bought a bicycle. I would wake up early in the morning to complete the work on a couple of watches, and then ride to the library before its doors opened. I made a strange sight, a shaikh wearing robes and a turban riding a bicycle. Those who caught sight of me often stared in surprise. A Christian newspaper even printed a news article on this strange sight. As for me, I never cared about any of it because I found it all unimportant. My real concern was saving time."

At another place, he wrote, "I spent all my free time pursuing knowledge, reading and researching Hadith books, and making notes. I would pay special attention to the manuscripts of Hadith books that I found in the Al-Zahiriya library. I spent at least 6-8 hours a day in the library, sometimes even up to 12 hours."

Other than a break for prayers, the majority of Nasiruddin's day was spent reading and researching at the library. The library administration had even reserved a room for him to work in.

When the staff members went for prayer and lunch break, closing the library, Nasiruddin remained inside surrounded by his books, having brought his food with him from home. In the evening, he returned home – sometimes delaying until night had fallen. Those around him would be amazed at the hard work and dedication that Nasiruddin displayed, but he was oblivious to all else. He just wanted to take advantage of the opportunity of his current time and place to gain as much knowledge as humanly possible. In reality, this work conducted with such diligence and focus was preparing him for a greater task that Allah intended for him.

Indexing the Books of Al-Zahiriya Library

It is a well-known observation that most booksellers and librarians are not nearly as helpful as a researcher might wish them to be when attempting to find relevant and useful books. The reason is that while these people are sitting on the treasure of knowledge, they are not keen to acquire it themselves. Their interest is limited to the administrative handling of the place, which is what they are paid to do anyway. They may know what titles they have, but not necessarily what those books contain, or which books are of the highest standards and quality. Thus it comes to the researcher or the student himself to evaluate and sift through the various books and properly catalogue their subject matter and relevance.

As Nasiruddin spent most of his waking hours at the Al-Zahiriya library, he had become intimately familiar with the scholarly works and masterpieces that the library contained while reading, summarizing and making notes of these books. Thus when the administration of the library decided to catalogue all the various manuscripts and works of the Hadith section, they asked for his help. Nasiruddin carried out this work meticulously, finding a number of rare and valuable manuscripts that not even the library administration knew

existed. Some scripts were so old that they were falling apart, and some had various pages and chapters missing. With careful diligence, Nasiruddin also carried out the hunt for these missing pages. He was successful in completing several scripts in this manner, resulting in a new collection of highly valuable historical evidence which opened new vistas of research and further study.

Gradually, Nasiruddin's prominence in this field began to spread, even as his interest in other institutes like Aleppo's Library of Al-Awqaf Al-Islamiyya grew. Nasiruddin would visit it to examine the manuscripts and books preserved in the library and make notes of whatever interested him. Whichever place he was told contained anything of value related to the Hadith sciences, Nasiruddin would endeavour to be there, gathering and collecting as much knowledge as possible. Without a doctoral degree, without writing countless papers and dissertations, Nasiruddin had become an expert in the field of Hadith.

Center of Attention for Researchers

As time went on, Nasiruddin came to be considered such an authority on Hadith sciences that students and professors from various universities would come to benefit from him. They would present their questions and difficulties, and Nasiruddin would give them satisfactory answers. He appointed two days a week for meeting with and teaching the students. Once it so happened that Nasiruddin was presiding over such a gathering and describing the various levels of *muhadditheen* (Hadith scholars). A companion of his, who was also a student, asked how a Hadith scholar could be considered to have reached the level of the *huffaz* (memorizers). Nasiruddin replied that a scholar who knew hundreds of thousands of Ahadith by heart, along with their chain of narrations, could be considered a *hafiz* (memorizer). At this, the student asked, "Can we say that our

shaikh (Nasiruddin) is also from among the *huffaz*?" Nasiruddin replied that it was a private matter which had no relevance for his students. The student repeated his question, but Nasiruddin gave the same reply. When the student began to insist strongly, Nasiruddin simply said, "It is a blessing and privilege from Allah which He grants to whomever He wills." Hearing this, the student exclaimed "Allahu Akbar!" loudly, adding that surely their shaikh was from among the *huffaz*. At such enthusiasm, Nasiruddin could not prevent a smile from touching his lips.

The truth of the matter is that those who possess innate talent and hone it through dedication and hard work are almost always recognized and appreciated by the world. Thus it was with Nasiruddin, who was invited by the Islamic University of Madina to teach Hadith sciences. Considering that Nasiruddin had never received a university degree nor studied under a great shaikh, but had only reached excellence through personal study, this was a flattering and unexpected offer. Such a top ranking university from the Islamic world had offered him a post as a teacher, and had further honored him by offering the opportunity to change the syllabus of the course as he pleased. Nasiruddin accepted both offers, and during the course of his professorship added the science of authentication to the course of Hadith sciences. Thus the students would learn not only what previous researchers and commentators had written about the authenticity and reliability of various Ahadith, but also how to weigh it for themselves and draw their own conclusions.

Research into Hadith Sciences

From the beginning, Nasiruddin had grasped the importance of Quran and Hadith as the two main sources of all religious knowledge in Islam. The early Hadith scholars had meticulously done the work of sifting the authentic *(sahih)* Ahadith from the total collection of quotes attributed to the Prophet (SAW), which also includes occasional fabrications and weakly sourced

quotations. However, after the original, diligent and thorough work of the Hadith scholars in the sixth and seventh century, such verification had not been repeated by later era scholars. To study the work of others, assuming its reliability, memorizing it and using it to form personal opinions is in itself no easy task. It is even more difficult and tiring to renew such work, carrying out all research personally, examining as many primary sources as possible and ensuring that the work can stand up to the scrutiny of modern day research standards. Nasiruddin Albani, however, judged such research necessary once again in the modern era, and accomplished a feat which no Hadith scholar in recent centuries had even come close to achieving. He evaluated tens of thousands of Ahadith, passing each one through a series of rigorous tests to determine its accuracy and reliability before rendering a judgment.

Shaikh Nasiruddin Albani was well aware that the existence and acceptance of weak or fabricated sayings of the Prophet (SAW) opens the door to a multitude of wrong and irreligious beliefs and practices. The early Hadith scholars did a great deal to prevent such sayings from being accepted into the collection of authentic Ahadith, including devising lists of criteria which reliable Ahadith must fulfil, writing books on ways to identify fabricated Ahadith, ensuring the integrity and preservation of accurate knowledge of Ahadith and passing it onto reliable and honourable students. However, with the passage of time, more effort was needed to counter the increasing influence of a certain segment that denied the Hadith as a valid source of religious teachings. They based their claims on the assumption that very few true Ahadith survived from the time of the Prophet (SAW) and that the majority were fabricated by those with vested interests or by religious scholars. To counter such claims, there was a great need for an expert who could beat them at their own game, as it were, with enough knowledge and skills to rival the early Hadith scholars. Nasiruddin Albani was the one chosen by Allah for this task, and his evaluatory work

on the thousands of sayings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), especially those contained in the six most prominent collections of Ahadith (*sahah sittah*), is impressive and breath-taking.

Nasiruddin compiled a summary of the Sahih Bukhari which is considered to be the most accurate book of Hadith in Sunni Islam. In the summary, Nasiruddin aimed to make the book easier for casual readers by removing the Ahadith that have been repeated multiple times in the original book. He also removed Ahadith that restate the same thing in slightly different wordings as reported by different narrators, although when the different wordings added some value, he preserved them. He gave each Hadith a rating of accuracy, depending on the evaluations to which he had subjected them, specially in regards to the chain of narration. Further, he also mentioned in the margins which classification degree each Hadith fell into, as well as explaining difficult terms and complicated concepts.

Nasiruddin carried out a similar task with the other prominent books of Ahadith, including Sunan Abi Dawood, Tirmidhi, Sunan Ibn Majah, and Sunan Nisai. He evaluated each Hadith belonging to each of these collections, rating its accuracy and reliability, and separated the accurate *sahih* Ahadith from the weaker ones. Nasiruddin's research had made him an expert in the Hadith evaluation criteria, both in terms of content as well as the hundreds of narrators who conveyed the Ahadith through the various chains of narration. Nasiruddin did not depend on the research conducted by the early Hadith scholars, not even the detailed explanations for each Hadith's source and accuracy as reported by Tirmidhi, and instead he carried out his own investigations regarding every single Hadith.

The beginning of this vast undertaking can be traced back to a series of articles by Albani, published in "Al-Tamaddun al-Islami" in which he detailed and commented on various *sahih* (accurate) Ahadith and deduced from them religious rulings.

This series was later compiled into a book called “Silsilat al-Ahadith As-Sahiha”, comprising of eight volumes, with each volume discussing around 500 Ahadith. Another book called “Silsilat al-Ahadith Ad-Daeefa” was published which dealt with over 14,000 *daeef* (weak) Ahadith, explaining in easy language the problems with the accuracy or reliability of the various reported sayings.

In addition, Nasiruddin wrote an abridged eight-volume version of the massive jurisprudence book “Irwa al-Ghalil” by Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, as well as an abridged version of the famous book “At-Targhib wat’Tarheeb” by Imam Al-Mundhiri. This extraordinary work took decades to complete, and Nasiruddin’s health declined as a result of his obsessive hard work and diligence, with his sight being particularly affected. Nasiruddin’s passion for his work was so great, however, that not even his health could stand in his way. An interesting anecdote that reflects this tendency is reported by Nasiruddin himself, which Abdul Khaliq quotes in his book. He writes:

“In the beginning, I had some slight problem with my eyesight. This was because of how much I strained my eyes, first with my work as a watchmaker and then with my long hours at the Al-Zahiriyya Library. When the problem with my eyes had persisted for almost 12 years, I decided to consult with an eye specialist, who recommended that my eyes needed complete rest for a while, so I should refrain from any delicate clockwork and any reading or writing activities for at least six months.

At first I obeyed my doctor, and rested at home for two weeks. Then I began to think that even during this period of rest I should avail my time for some purpose and at least get some work done which would not count as disobeying the doctor’s orders. I remembered a book stored in the library called “Dhamm al-Ma’azeef” (condemnation of musical instruments) by Hafiz bin Abi al-Dunya. It was in the form of a manuscript,

and to my knowledge it had not yet been published anywhere. I thought it would be a good idea if someone copied it down for me. By the time the copy was finished, I would have completed the rest period and so without disobeying the doctor, I would be able to compare it with the original manuscript to check for editing errors and then write a commentary on it and publish it.

However, when the scribe reached the middle of the book, he informed me that the manuscript was flawed. I told him to continue the transcription. After the copy was complete, I began to compare it with the original manuscript, and soon found the flaw – four pages were missing from the manuscript. I pondered how I could find those four pages. The manuscript had been in a separate section of the library where miscellaneous manuscripts had been compiled together, with several joined under a single binding. These compilations had many differences, including writing, the titles, the color, and even the size of the manuscripts. It occurred to me that the organizer of that particular section of the library may have accidentally included the missing pages into a different binding. Thus full of hope, I began to eagerly search through each binding in the section, either forgetting or deliberately ignoring the complete rest ordered by the eye specialist. My excuse was that this was not technically disobedience of the doctor's orders because I was skimming and lightly reading, and not examining each manuscript closely nor doing any writing, both of which would strain the eyes more.

I had only been through a few of the bindings when I found myself astonished. Here was a hidden treasure, with several writings by famous scholars which I had never seen elsewhere. I paused my search for the four missing pages and became quite absorbed in inspecting these writings. I was longing to have these manuscripts properly transcribed, and then published along with a critical evaluation and commentary. Unfortunately, these manuscripts often had entire sections missing. Sometimes

the beginning was missing, sometimes the conclusion, and at other times a couple of chapters in the middle. Thus it was impossible to fully compile a complete manuscript and send it for publishing. I continued my search for the missing pages, but could not find them until I had been through all the 152 compiled volumes of that section of the library.

While I was searching, I had noted down in my diary the titles of all the books and manuscripts that had caught my attention. I was encouraged to see that I had discovered some gaps which had prevented proper documentation of the references of the manuscripts. Therefore, when I did not find the missing pages in my search of that section of the library, I considered that perhaps the pages had instead been filed within a Hadith book in the Hadith section of the library. Now I began to search through the volumes in the Hadith section, until I had looked through every single Hadith book, but the missing pages continued to elude me. During my search, I had continued to note the titles of all the books and booklets that seemed significant and made an impression. After the Hadith section, I moved on to the other sections in pursuit of the missing pages, but after searching every volume in the entire library, around 10,000 works in total, I still had not found my quarry.

I was unwilling to give up, so I determined to go through all the loose papers considered trash since the book or author they belonged to could not be discovered. Very carefully I went through the entire collection of papers, but still the missing pages remained missing. I reflected that Allah had provided me with a gateway to a major research opportunity, since I had come across many works and many pieces of information of which I had previously been unaware. My search had shown that hidden in the Al-Zahiriyya Library is a treasure trove of writings and literary works by our ancestors, some of which are so rare that they cannot be found anywhere else in the world and many of which have not even been published.

After this revelation, I decided to go through all the manuscripts in the library once more. Like the first time, from these books I documented all the knowledge that was related to my field of interest, thus keeping a record of everything related to the Hadith sciences. I did not fail to record anything, even a single page or a lone chapter. This was also Allah's blessing upon me that I decided to search again through the collection of loose papers for the third and the last time.

In this phase I was to examine each book in detail, critically evaluating it and making notes of each report of a Hadith and any points of interest. During my second search I had accidentally come across some points of interest and I could not be satisfied until I was sure that I had extracted all relevant points from every chapter of every book. Thus I gathered all necessary tools and began my third search through the collection. I left no stone unturned, no page unread, and I documented every Hadith I came across and every piece of relevant knowledge I could find. This documentation comprises of 40 volumes, with each volume consisting of around 400 pages. On each page is a Hadith noted through every one of its sources as well as full explanations.

I organized the Ahadith in this collection according to alphabetical order, and I treat them as a reference book for all my other writings and works. This allows me to more easily write critical evaluations, summaries and commentaries of books. This was not easy but immensely beneficial especially since in the modern times many scholars do not bother to look any deeper than superficial explanations and summaries.

If Allah had made my search for those missing pages easy for me, I would never have amassed such an enormous collection of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). All praise belongs to Allah by Whose grace all good things come to completion. Observe how He shone a single ray of light in front of my eyes

and how it became a magnificent gift from Him. Indeed, He is the Lord of majesty and bounty."

Rejection of Innovation in Religion and Spreading the True Message

Shaikh Nasiruddin Albani had begun his education by studying the books of the Hanafi school of thought. As he expanded his interests and began to explore other areas of Islamic jurisprudence, he started to often disagree with his father on various issues. The first issue Nasiruddin had researched and formed a strong opinion on was the religious worship that takes place at graves and burial sites. He suggested that not only is building mosques at grave sites wrong, but that praying *salah* at those locations is also forbidden. He was shocked and grieved to realise, however, that instead of debating with him using logic and evidence, the followers of various schools of thought were bound by their narrow-mindedness. This convinced him that to be able to separate right from wrong it was essential to throw away old prejudices and biased ways of thinking, and to seek the truth from wherever it may be. After a great deal of research and study, Nasiruddin came to the conclusion that Imam Ibn Taimiyyah's and Imam Ibn al-Qayyim's way of thinking and their reliance on the primary sources of Quran and Hadith matched his own preferences most closely, and he thus adopted their method of focusing on the *sunnah* (practices of the Prophet) when spreading the message of Islam.

Nasiruddin began with himself, and in all decisions and matters he made the greatest possible effort to treat the adoption of the *sunnah* as the highest priority. Allama Muhammad bin Saalih Al-Uthaymeen says, "When I met the shaikh, I sensed that he is very passionate about preserving and following the *sunnah*, and about eliminating any innovations and new inventions in

religion. Whether such innovations are related to false beliefs or false practices, he takes strong action against them."

In his lectures Nasiruddin Albani focused a lot on the importance of *tawheed* (monotheism) and of avoiding any form of *shirk* (paganism). He presented to his students books like *Zaad al-Ma'aad* by Ibn al-Qayyim, *Nukhbat al-Fikr* by Hafiz Ibn Hajr, *Kitab al-Tawheed* by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab, *Al-Adab al-Mufrad* by Imam Bukhari and the compilations of Imam Shawkani. The attendees of his lectures comprised not only of university students but also prominent scholars. At first these lectures took place in his own home, but when he ran out of space they were arranged at the houses of his various friends. When those also became too small for the number of attendees, a larger house was rented specifically for the purpose of his lectures. Now people from all walks of life began to consult Nasiruddin Albani for religious rulings and advice, from judges to the members and heads of welfare organisations to prominent and famous scholars. Many of them were in regular correspondence with him through mail, and yet others contacted him by telephone to ask questions and consult for advice.

In his lectures Nasiruddin recommended two methods that should be employed to solve the academic and practical problems that Muslims encounter: *tazkiyyah* and *tarbiyyah*. By *tazkiyyah*, he referred to the genuine and pure Islamic way of thinking, uncontaminated by any non-Islamic influences. On the other hand, *tarbiyyah* was what he called growth of a Muslim's character, habits and attitudes in accordance with Islamic values and not for worldly gains. He insisted that a Muslim's *tarbiyyah* should be such that his or her entire focus should be on the consequences of good or bad actions in the hereafter, and that all religious rulings, whether easy to understand or not, should be followed to the best of one's ability, trusting in Allah's wisdom and knowledge.

The shaikh emphasized the oneness of Allah and the revival of the *sunnah* the most in his speeches and lectures, discouraging blind following of one's ancestors or scholars and encouraging people to seek out the truth for themselves. He found the prevalence of wrong beliefs and practices due to misinterpreted or fabricated Ahadith greatly worrying, and he encouraged his students to study the books of Imam Ibn Taimiyyah and Imam Ibn al-Qayyim. For the interpretation of the Quran he preferred the version by Ibn Kathir, while for an introduction to Hadith sciences he recommended Imam Nawawi's *Riyadh as-Saliheen*. For students who wanted to study jurisprudence, he advised them to study *Fiqh us-Sunnah* and *al Fiqh al Mayassar* by Sayyid Sabiq and *Subul as-Salam* by Imam San'aani. He particularly instructed all his students to pray for God-consciousness (*taqwa*), and to aim to achieve it in all their deeds. He would inform them that only knowledge that is useful and is tranformed into action will help them on the Day of Judgment, else it may actually count against them.

When Nasiruddin Albani became famous, he began to receive invitations to visit and speak at various locations. The first invitations were from within Syria; he briefly visited and gave lectures in the cities of Homs, Hama, Idlib, Aleppo, Raqqa and Latakia. When the invitations and requests became even more frequent, he allotted three days each month for the purpose of preaching. Various cities began to host Hadith courses. Hadith gatherings were arranged where attendees would ask him questions and he would give detailed answers to satisfy each questioner. His beliefs and ideas spread far and wide to Algeria, Egypt, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Morocco. People in these countries started supporting his movement for the revival of the *sunnah*. Nasiruddin was invited to countless conferences and meetings, and to participate in them he travelled to the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Switzerland.

Facing Opposition

Nasiruddin Albani had raised the banner of reviving the *sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW). While he had many people flocking to him, correcting their beliefs and joining his mission, there were also a large number of people who opposed him openly. Most of his opponents could not meet him in a battle of wits, nor back their viewpoints with evidence and logic like he could, so they preferred to wield the tools of rumours and propaganda. Their aim was to make him so controversial that the governments themselves would turn on him and put obstacles in his way.

Shaikh Albani himself played some role in making enemies. In face-to-face dialogue, his entire focus was on providing proof of his claims and he easily brushed off his opponents' insults or accusations. However, when he wrote to negate wrong opinions or beliefs, his language often became harsh and absolute, and the words he used were quite strong in order to make the greatest impact. Naturally this attitude led to an increase in the number of his opponents. Shaikh Majzoob writes about Nasiruddin Albani:

"To judge the character of a scholar, one must examine their dignity, sobriety and their tolerance of others. Thank God, the Shaikh (Albani) demonstrates this quite well in his personality. However, he also displays an intensity that can turn into harshness on occasions, not only with his opponents but also with his supporters. Why is this so? I cannot answer that with any level of certainty, but I have observed that one reason for this may be his extraordinary self-confidence in regards to his knowledge and insight. What he deems to be right he has already researched a great deal, so when he encounters an opinion that goes against that research and reflection, he criticises it without reserve. He does not take into account the fact that the scholars whose opinions he is disagreeing with also possess a high degree of scholarship, knowledge and wisdom."

Shaikh Albani was a great proponent of freedom of speech and freedom of thought. He often referred to and quoted Imam Ibn Taimiyyah and Imam Ibn al-Qayyim, but where he disagreed with them he had no reservations in saying so and expressing his own opinion. His friendship or rivalry with someone had no impact on his scholarly opinions and beliefs. It often happened that the passionate followers of a particular school of thought attended one of his gatherings and spoke at length against him, objecting to his various opinions and criticising him freely. On these occasions the Shaikh held on to his patience and tolerance to the best of his ability.

Once his student Sameer bin Ameen brought to a gathering an opponent of the Shaikh's in the hopes that he would benefit from listening to him. The opponent began to argue with the Shaikh loudly. Sameer's temper started to fray at this incivility while the Shaikh replied to each question and argument with a smile and a reference to the Quran or Hadith. Finally the opponent began to listen to the Shaikh and his words began to make an impression. At the end he said, "I'm glad that you've changed, and that I met you after you changed." To this the Shaikh replied, "I have not changed, and these companions of mine who have been with me for twenty years will tell you that my nature has always remained the same. Still, may Allah bless you. As for me, if I have ever hurt or offended you then I ask for your forgiveness, and if I have ever hurt or offended any Muslim then I seek Allah's forgiveness." So saying, the Shaikh wept.

This was the enigma of Shaikh Albani. He was simultaneously soft-hearted and yet unyielding and strict. This strictness is not limited to him; it is commonly observed in the scholars and followers of Ahl-e Hadith and those of the Salafi school of thought. Although they appear to be of sound logic and are focused in their wish to follow the practices of the Prophet (SAW), yet they often fail to emulate the Prophet's example in

flexibility and tolerance of others. If they develop a greater extent of scholarly modesty and flexibility, and keep in mind the Islamic tradition of friendly disagreement and freedom of thought, they would be more successful in persuading their opponents towards reviving the *sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW). In this context, Dr. Mahmood Ahmed Ghazi writes in his book "*Muhaadirat al-Hadith*" an anecdote about Nasiruddin Albani's students and followers:

"Speaking of a shaikh who has recently passed away, his students display quite a high level of intolerance and severity. If their shaikh has declared a Hadith to be weak, then they are willing to move heaven and earth in order to prove it weak. Once in an Arab country I was giving a lecture, in the course of which I quoted a Hadith. One of the attendees who was around the age of forty and had learned from this shaikh caused a great deal of disturbance. He insisted that this Hadith was weak, and that his shaikh had done some research etc. on the topic to prove so. I said to the attendee that I do not deny your shaikh's research – he is a respected scholar and his opinions have their weight. However, if your shaikh has the right to disagree with the opinion of Imam Tirmidhi, then other scholars certainly have the right to disagree with your shaikh. Indeed, other scholars have done some specific research on the research of your shaikh. Recently a scholar in Damascus has published a five-volume book in which he has disagreed with some of your shaikh's categorisations of Hadith as weak or strong.

Let me name the shaikh in question. Shaikh Nasiruddin Albani was a very famous and respected scholar who passed away only recently. If the best Hadith scholars of the twentieth century were to be named, his name would certainly be among the top. He re-examined all the major books of Hadith and marked each Hadith mentioned in these books as strong or weak in reliability as his research indicated. Now if Shaikh Albani can disagree with Imam Tirmidhi, then today's scholars can disagree with

Shaikh Albani. For us they are both worthy of respect and admiration; as Imam Muslim said, we would be willing to kiss their feet. But if Albani can disagree with Tirmidhi then a new scholar can disagree with Albani. God forbid, this does not at all reduce his stature or the respect that we hold for him. Our respect for him is a different matter, and our disagreement with him is a different matter."

Indeed, this was exactly the opinion of Shaikh Nasiruddin. However, over-enthusiastic students and followers of a scholar often times go so far in spreading the message of their shaikh and convincing others of his truth that they forget the warnings and opinions of their own teacher on this matter. Shaikh Albani had said to his students, fans and followers: "We must remember to treat those who disagree with us with compassion and tolerance. If we choose the wrong methods when calling people to the religion, we will only increase our problems."

It would be accurate to say that Nasiruddin Albani was firm in his convictions but tolerant and compassionate when dealing with people. This frequently led to misguided opponents conceding defeat and joining his lectures as students, and the Shaikh would be sure to treat them kindly. When he was ill, the doctor who examined him in the hospital was clean-shaven. After he finished the examination, he asked the Shaikh to pray for him. The Shaikh said a prayer that was both loving and wise. He said, "May Allah adorn you with what He has adorned men (i.e. a beard)."

Despite his tolerance, however, his rivals and enemies increased everyday – as happens with famous and prominent persons. His enemies continued to spread rumours and bring negative attention to any possibly controversial opinion of the Shaikh's, which in turn attracted government attention. The Shaikh did not mind being called a Salafi because he believed in following in the footsteps of our ancestors when it comes to religious

practices, insisting that people should not invent new practices in religion and should follow what the early Muslims (*salaf*) believed and practiced. When people asked him about Ahmadis or about Sufis, the Shaikh did not dissemble and presented his opinion directly and unequivocally. A natural result of this was that all these groups turned against him and expressed vehement disagreement with him. Some factions that had influence on the Syrian government conspired against him and succeeded in bringing his lectures and teaching to an abrupt halt.

Imprisonment and a Period of Trials

Like most great people, Nasiruddin Albani was very focused on his work and overcame every obstacle in his way in order to continue towards his goal. He would say to his friends, "Our opponents have prevailed as much as they could. We were persecuted, our gatherings were stopped, and our preaching and lectures were brought to an end. Look, we still have not managed to get rid of these issues. Only occasionally a group of friends manages to gather, and when this is made impossible, we turn to academic pursuits which we will never abandon."

Nasiruddin faced frequent accusations and slander. Once a faction of the Sufis accused him of "promoting Wahabi da'wah and confusing Muslims", and made a formal complaint to the Grand Mufti. Nasiruddin was summoned to the director in charge, and eventually declared innocent. In 1996, he was persecuted once more and this time was imprisoned in the Citadel of Damascus, the same prison where Imam Ibn Taimiyyah and his student Ibn al-Qayyim had once been imprisoned. Here Nasiruddin started preaching amongst the prison inmates and also arranged for the Friday prayers to be offered in congregation in the prison – a phenomenon that had last occurred when Imam Ibn Taimiyyah was imprisoned there. Thus Allah turned this period of difficulty into a blessing and an opportunity for the Shaikh. Other than spending his time in

preaching and worship, he also finished his summary and notes on Sahih Muslim, the famous book of Hadith. After six months of incarceration, Nasiruddin was released from prison and resumed his previous activities.

He was also attacked by his enemies a couple of times but Allah kept him and his family safe. During his stay in Beirut (Lebanon), he was the victim of an assassination attempt through firing at his car, but he survived and soon after moved to Amman, Jordan.

Literary Works

Shaikh Nasiruddin Albani's life had been dedicated to academic and literary pursuits. His prominence had come initially through his published articles and writings. Although his focus shifted to lectures and preaching in later years, he always kept up with his research and continued to publish papers until the end. Most of his papers were published in the journal "*At-Tamaddun al-Islami*". The academic standard of his writings was so high that they naturally attracted the attention of major scholars. His papers were his original claim to fame, and these along with his evaluations of Ahadith's accuracy and reliability highlighted him in the eyes of Hadith scholars in particular. His research on Ahadith was collected and published in the form of books, especially his summary and commentary on the six most prominent Hadith books (*sahah sittah*). These became so famous that most religious books when referencing a Hadith also include a comment on what Albani's research says about that Hadith.

Other than his vast research in the field of Hadith sciences, Albani also wrote on matters of jurisprudence. He discussed topics like the Prophet's prayer from beginning to end, the concept of *wasila* along with its types and ruling, constructing mosques on burial sites, the ruling on the face veil of Muslim women, the key to a successful marriage, *tarawih* in Ramadan,

rulings regarding funerals, the *hajj* of the Prophet, the ruling on beards, the second coming of the Christ and the anti-Christ, shortening the prayer when travelling, the prayer of *kusoof* (upon seeing an eclipse), the prayer of *istisqaa'* (the prayer for rain), and many more. He wrote abridgements and summaries of many books. He also wrote commentaries and criticisms of literary papers written by other scholars. His works amount to over 200 publications, along with thousands of cassettes and recordings of his lectures and gatherings (of which some are available to the public and others are yet to be released).

One of the most impressive features of his writing is that he relies on the use of logic, solid arguments and evidence to support his claims instead of focusing on eloquence, wordiness or emotional arguments. He quotes reliable sources to defend his opinions and to affirm or deny whether certain beliefs and practices are a part of Islam. When criticising others for wrong beliefs, he is as severe with prominent classical scholars as he is with his contemporaries. His books contain much benefit and value for students of Hadith and jurisprudence in particular, but also for the general public.

Death

After around sixty years of serving the religion Shaikh Albani's health deteriorated. Despite his failing health he continued his academic pursuits as much as he was able, with the help of his sons and grandchildren. They would procure various books for him and help him seek out references. When Nasiruddin felt too tired to write, someone would be available to take down what he dictated. Till his last moments his mind was as sharp as ever. Two days before his death, he summoned his summary of Sunan Abi Dawood to his bedside and began to look through it for any mistakes or editing errors. Although his body was fading, his mind was active.

After an operation, when he came to consciousness in the hospital he heard someone say, “Souls are like conscripted soldiers.” To this, he replied, “Yes, souls are like conscripted soldiers. Those whom they recognize they get along with, and those whom they do not recognize they do not get along with.” This was actually part of a Hadith that he quoted correctly despite having just woken up from his operation. Till his last breath, Shaikh Albani continued to work to the best of his abilities, until on 22 Jamadi’ul Aakhir 1420 AH, corresponding to 2nd October 1999 CE, he passed away after Asr prayers at the age of 88 years.

A little while before his death, Nasiruddin had instructed as part of his will that his burial should not be delayed in order to wait for people to gather. Thus preparations for his burial began directly after he passed away, and that same night after Isha prayers he was taken to the nearest graveyard for burial. His funeral procession was on foot, and the graveyard chosen was the same one about which he had once mentioned to a friend that he would prefer to be buried there close to home so that people would not have to travel to the graveyard in automobiles.

Although only a few hours had passed from his death to his burial, the news of his passing had spread to the nearby regions. Thousands of people gathered to participate in his funeral prayers. As soon as the news of death was made public, all over the world Muslims offered funeral prayers for him. Leading scholars of Islam paid great tribute to him and his work, and the services he had rendered for the Muslim nation. The professor of jurisprudence at the Islamic University of Madina, Shaikh Abdul Muhsin Al-Ibad Al-Badr said:

“Shaikh Muhammad Nasiruddin Albani is such a person that the entire Islamic world mourned his passing. He rose to prominence due to his efforts for the revival of the *sunnah* of the Prophet, for his unstinting hard work in the field of Hadith

sciences, and his classification of Ahadith as strong or weak based on vast research. His defence of the beliefs of the *salaf* and his explanations of their practices and rulings is an extraordinary achievement. No student of Hadith can progress in his field without referring to him and reading his books and other works, because they are an ocean of information and knowledge. Indeed, the death of a scholar of such caliber is a great loss for Muslims. It is a tragedy for the religion of Islam."

In his book "Muhammad Nasiruddin Albani", Abdul Khaliq quotes a comment by Shaikh Abdullah Talidi's student Hussain al-Shabu, "Shaikh Nasiruddin Albani was the Abu Hurayra of his time." Hussain mentions in this context that he dreamt once that his teacher was speaking to several students and saying, what a pity that Abu Hurayra has died. In his dream he felt grieved that the Prophet's companion Abu Hurayra had died and he could not even meet him once to hear a saying of the Prophet (SAW) directly from him. When he woke up, he found that his cheeks were wet with tears. He says that he knew at once that some scholar of Hadith must have passed away. Then he heard the news that Shaikh Albani had died. When he narrated this dream to his teacher, he agreed that Albani was indeed the Abu Hurayra of the modern era.

Traits and Characteristics

Nasiruddin's personality was a mixture of charm and gravitas. His handsome face and tall height combined with his extraordinary intellect, sharp mind and vast reserves of knowledge would make a strong impact on anyone who met him. His memory retention was excellent. If he paused his lecture to get up and address something urgent, he would resume the thread of conversation seamlessly upon his return. He had memorized hundreds of thousands of Ahadith and he knew them as intimately as a man knows his own child. This level of familiarity with the sayings of the Prophet (SAW) had

come from the countless hours that he spent trying to understand, investigate and interpret each reported saying of the Prophet. It was a well-known characteristic of his and an essential facet of his personality that he was a man of untiring hard work and of utter focus on his current pursuit. Those who had the opportunity to spend significant time in his company report that he spent almost 17 to 18 hours daily in research and academic endeavours. He avoided small talk, unnecessary conversation and endless meetings.

Nasiruddin's student Basim Faisal narrates that once he went to Al-Zahiriyya Library in order to meet with the Shaikh. He had hoped that the Shaikh would pause his studies to attend to him and that they would have an engaging discussion, but Nasiruddin Albani after exchanging greetings became immersed once more in his books. He (Basim) felt quite disappointed at this. Nasiruddin understood his feelings and said, "Look, every day more than twenty people come here to visit me. If I talk freely with each visitor, I will never be able to get anything done and all my time will be wasted. Then I will not gain any new knowledge, and that will definitely be of no benefit to anyone.

This does not mean, however, that Nasiruddin never paid attention to those around him. When he was teaching at the Islamic University of Madina he was always surrounded by students. They showered him with questions and he continued to answer them good-naturedly until he reached his car. Then several of his students would get into the car with him and accompany him home, asking questions all the while and he would answer each question to the satisfaction of the questioner. Everybody who knew him even slightly knew very well that he was extremely particular about the worth of time. Even if he were ill, he did not like to sit idle. Instead, he would dictate articles and notes to his children while lying in bed.

If he stumbled upon something interesting while reading, he would pursue it relentlessly. Dr. Mahmood Meerah narrates that once in search of a particular manuscript Shaikh Albani used a stepladder to access the bookshelves higher up in Al-Zahiriyya Library. Having found the book, he forgot to come down the ladder and stood there reading for around six hours until he had finished it. Whenever something caught his attention he would pursue it with single-minded focus, not allowing any obstacles or difficulties to overcome or hinder him. In his early years, he did not have enough money to afford free access to paper in order to make notes, so he would pick up discarded papers thrown out with the trash and make do using their blank sides to make notes.

Another major aspect of his personality was his dislike of fame, popularity and fawning admiration from his devotees. If his students tried to kiss his hand he would snatch it away. Once his companion Abu Is'haq asked him, "Why do you forbid us from kissing your hand when it is permissible to kiss the hand of a scholar?" Nasiruddin asked in reply, "Have you ever seen a scholar with your own eyes?" Abu Is'haq answered, "I see one in front of me right now." To this he merely responded, "I am only a seeker of knowledge."

This strong preference of his was also reflected in what places he decided to visit. Once someone invited him to come to Bangladesh and address students there. The Shaikh refused. His supporter kept insisting and he continued to refuse, until someone asked him why he was so adamantly refusing a harmless invitation. He said, "I am afraid to put myself in the path of temptation. The people of the Indian subcontinent often go too far in expressing admiration and respect." He gave the same reason at another occasion for denying an invitation to come to Pakistan, saying, "The people there praise one too much, and I dislike that."

It often happened that people recognised him when he was going somewhere and became excited to find him in their midst. Instead of being flattered or gratified, it worried the Shaikh to find himself the subject of such attention and admiration. Once he was sitting in a car when a passerby glimpsed his face and recognised him. He came running to the Shaikh in excitement, exclaiming, "You are Shaikh Albani, aren't you?" His visible joy and enthusiasm brought tears to the Shaikh's eyes. When he was asked why that should upset him, he replied, "Man should always beware of himself, and he should constantly fight against lesser impulses and desires. He should not be deceived by the fame and popularity that he appears to have among the people."

Nasiruddin had a soft heart, and this was often reflected in the tears that flowed from his eyes at the slightest provocation. Several people saw in their dreams glad tidings about the Shaikh and his abode in the Hereafter. Whenever someone reported such a dream, he was moved to tears. If he was introduced somewhere with extravagant praise, he would immediately murmur the prayer of the companion Abu Bakr: "My Lord, do not hold me accountable for what they say about me, and forgive me for what they do not know about me, and make me even better than what they believe about me." He was often seen weeping heart-wrenchingly when reciting the Quran or reading Ahadith that warn of Allah's anger, punishment or the hellfire. Sometimes he wept so much that his throat would close up and it would become difficult for him to speak.

As mentioned earlier, Nasiruddin was often severe in defending his opinions, usually due to the fact that they were well researched and based on solid evidence. However, if his opinion was ever shown to be a mistake, he did not hesitate to correct his opinion and to own up to his mistake. Indeed, he would be grateful to the person who had corrected him. Abdul Khaliq refers to a work by Nasiruddin in which he writes about the

Hadith 5219 of Sahih Al-Jami': "I made a mistake in this Hadith, and I hereby remove my sentence. I admit that I was mistaken and pray that Allah forgives me. Thus the Sahih Al-Jami' should be corrected by removing the aforementioned sentence." If asked about an issue on which he did not have much knowledge, he would simply say that he will try to give a reply after discussing it with other scholars.

Those familiar with the Shaikh's private life knew that he was eager to help others in their financial, personal or moral problems. He had a tendency to spend a lot in charity, giving to sick people who could not afford healthcare, widows who did not have a reliable source of income, and even helping out young couples trying to get married. If someone needed a ride, he would offer his own car, and say that lending one's car to someone who needs it is the compulsory charity (*zakah*) of owning a car. He gave expensive gifts to people who he knew needed the money. He would intercede on behalf of people seeking a job, although he refused to accept any gift or payment in return for the intercession, quoting the Hadith of the Prophet, reported by Abu Dawood, "If anyone intercedes for his brother, and he presents a gift to him for it and he accepts the gift, then he approaches a huge door of the doors of *riba* (interest; usury)."

Sometimes people take out a loan with interest in a time of desperation and then become stuck in a cycle of increasing payments and no way out. Nasiruddin took great pleasure in helping such people, and he would comment, "I wish Allah would make me a millionaire, and I could help the thousands of people who are trapped by the cycle of interest."

Nasiruddin Albani gave great importance to the proper worship of the Creator. He made sure to offer not only the obligatory and recommended prayers but extra optional ones too. On Friday, he would go early to the mosque and spend his time

praying until the imam came to the pulpit to give his sermon. He would fast on Mondays and Thursdays and completed over thirty pilgrims *(hajj)* in his lifetime as well as several dozen *umras*.

He was married thrice, and in total had thirteen children. Of these, Shaikha Anisa in particular follows in the footsteps of her father. She edited some of her father's works after his death, and continued to publish his manuscripts and release them to the public. Apart from his biological heirs, his real heirs are his students, his works and his library. In his last will and testament, Nasiruddin donated the entire contents of his personal library to the Islamic University of Madina, to which he was particularly attached as he had spent significant time there. He was also awarded the King Faisal International Prize in 1999 by the Saudi government for his 'contribution to the study, verification and authentication of the Hadith'. Shaikh Abdul Aziz Abdullah bin Baz was an avid admirer of Shaikh Albani, despite his own prominence as a scholar and his vast knowledge. He once commented, "In today's world, I do not know a single scholar under the sun who knows more about the Hadith sciences than Shaikh Albani." He considered Nasiruddin to be not only a great Hadith scholar but also a good and pious man.

The truth of the matter is that Shaikh Nasiruddin Albani was one of the rare souls who did true value-adding work in the field of Hadith sciences and renewed its authenticity and legitimacy. He revived the work that had been paused centuries ago. He made the science of Hadith authentication and critical evaluation easier for the students of Hadith. Not only did he throw his heart and soul into quality research on the verification of Ahadith, he also used his teaching and lectures to blow the spirit of revival of the *sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW) into the people. Another achievement was that Nasiruddin successfully broke through decades of following the school of thought one

was born into and encouraged the Muslims to seek out the truth for themselves, even if it means agreeing with a different school of thought. This in itself was no small matter. Prejudice, a biased outlook and a desire to see one's own school of thought win the debate (regardless of the real truth) have been the biggest enemies of religious Muslims for decades, perhaps even centuries. It distracts them from their true purpose, and they instead spend their lives trying to prove something which does not need to be proven.

The tendency of Muslim scholars to become obsessed debating unnecessary details and the tendency of the general Muslim population to become sidetracked with new innovations in religion have been major problems for generations. Shaikh Albani fought this with all his might, forming solid opinions on important religious issues and vehemently arguing against any innovations or distortions of religion. He used both verbal and written eloquence to persuade the people to his point of view, and he did not allow any obstacle to prevent him from his path. Neither the conspiracies of his opponents nor the pressure from government authorities could succeed in stopping him from stating what he believed to be true.

Thousands of Albani's students, who internalised and embraced the message that he was trying to spread, continue with his mission. His legacy, his works and his life all carry a vital message for the Muslims of today. The Muslim Ummah needs to embrace his approach of impartiality, objectivity, hard work, focus and the use of logic and evidence instead of emotional appeals to seek out and spread the truth. Religious problems should be solved not through blind following of the school of thought of one's birth but through careful inspection of the various opinions and research in order to come to a meaningful conclusion. Finally, the Shaikh is a role model when it comes to productive use of time and refraining from pursuits which have no benefit in this world or next.

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About the Author

Naima Sohaib is the author of *"Islami Tareekh ki Qabil-e-Fakhr Shakhsiat"*, a 480-page book in Urdu about fifteen eminent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author. It is the sequel of her first book *"Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shakhsiat"* which discusses twenty prominent Muslim personalities and has seen its fourth edition.

Naima has a Masters in Islamic Studies from University of Karachi and did her B.Sc. in Mathematics from Lahore College for Women. She has also authored several storybooks for children. She lives in Bahrain with her husband and four daughters.

About the Translator

Rida Sohaib, 22, is the English translator of the original Urdu work. An avid reader, she finds particular inspiration in reflecting upon the lives of Muslims born in difficult times who are forced to rise up to the challenge of leadership and find that they bear the mantle well. Her reverence for such heroes is what inspires her to take up the task of translation in the hope that others will find their stories as rewarding and motivational as she does.

Rida has recently completed her Masters in Psychiatry from Cardiff University, UK, following a Bachelors in Psychology from University College London, UK.

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Naima Sohaib

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Foreword

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

In a world of dirty politics and incompetent leaders, it often feels as if capable and altruistic leaders who lead a nation to victory and protect their people are a mere dream. It is difficult to name a single politician who inspires with their character, competence and genuine love for the people without lining their own pockets. In such a world the life of Nizam al-Mulk Tusi appears as a fresh breath of air.

Nizam al-Mulk almost single-handedly brought the Seljuq empire of the 11th century to its peak, caring for the king and the people with commendable dedication. His wisdom and insight in preventing crises, his understanding of the world of politics and intrigue, and his avoidance of entangling himself in conspiracies make him a figure of much admiration and respect. Finally, his work as an educationist in establishing the Nizamiyya institutes which revolutionized the education system in the Islamic world left behind him a legacy which has effects on the world to this day. The translation of this book is both a token of my admiration for him and a reminder that not all politicians are corrupt and self-serving. The example of Nizam al-Mulk as a role model give us hope that today's politicians can emulate him and elevate themselves to the level of statesmen.

I would like to thank Naima Sohaib for inspiring me with her reverence for Muslim heroes which is reflected in her writings,

and Sohaib Umar for editing this translation. May Allah SWT accept our efforts.

Rida Sohaib

Nizam al-Mulk Tusi

A Great Statesman and Educationist

Who was Nizam al-Mulk Tusi?

His name was Hasan, his nickname (*kuniat*) was Abu Ali, and his title was Nizam al-Mulk. His lineage is Hasan bin Ali bin Ishaq.

Birth

Hasan was born on the 21st of Dhul Qa'ada in 408 AH (1017 CE) on a Friday in the village of Radkan located in Tus, Persia. His association with Tus leads to the addition of Tusi next to his title.

Childhood and Early Life

Hasan belonged to a middle class family of landowners. His father Ali bin Ishaq was engaged in agriculture. His mother Zamurrud Khatun named him Hasan after the Prophet's grandson due to a dream she had before he was born. Hasan was young when his mother passed away. His father was facing financial difficulties at the time, but cognizant of the importance of knowledge, he arranged for a good quality education for his son. He himself was considered an expert in mathematics, measurement and jurisprudence, which is why the local governor appointed him as tax collector.

When Hasan entered school, his first teacher was the scholar Abdul Samad Kandoji. Hasan's extraordinary intellect and memory soon made him prominent among his peers. He was naturally organized and disciplined from a young age. He advised his teachers on how to divide the large number of students into efficient groups, with some students as monitors.

This organizational skill helped him a lot in later years. At the age of eleven, he finished memorizing the Quran, after which his father sent him to Nishapur. Nishapur was at the time considered a hub of knowledge and education. Here he joined the lectures of Imam Mawfiq, a respected scholar within the Shafai school of thought. He studied with him for four years, then traveled to Bukhara where he studied many disciplines from various religious schools. Like his father he had a special interest in mathematics. He also became proficient in the Arabic language, as well as frequently attended the lectures of Hadith scholars.

Hasan spent a few years in Ghazni, working in an office to earn money. His marriage and the subsequent birth of two sons increased his financial responsibilities. He therefore traveled to Balkh and became secretary to the governor Abu Ali Ahmed bin Shazan. After a while, the governor's hard temper persuaded him to leave the post, and he headed towards Merv, the capital city of Khorasan which was then ruled by Chaghry Baig Dawood Saljuqi. He joined Dawood's court, who soon discovered his talents and appointed him the mentor and tutor of his son Alp Arslan. He instructed his son to respect his tutor as he respected his father, and to never ignore his advice. Alp Arslan remained Hasan's student until his father Dawood died. Five years later, Dawood's brother Tughril, the leader of the Seljuq kingdom, died childless. His death sparked conflict over the succession of the kingdom. Hasan's clever reasoning and strategy led to the resolution of the conflict and he was able to maneouvre Alp Arslan into the position of the ruler. Alp Arslan appointed Hasan as his special vizier, and gave him the title Nizam al-Mulk, which can be translated as Order of the Kingdom. Alp Arslan also appointed Hasan as the mentor of his eleven year old son, Malik Shah. The heavy burden of maintaining order and discipline in the huge dynasty now fell mainly on Hasan's shoulders. The Seljuqi empire was vast, stretching from Yemen to China. To understand properly what

Nizam al-Mulk attempted and achieved during his time as a vizier, a description of the historical backdrop of the time is necessary.

Historical Background

With the downfall of the Abbasid caliphate came the end of political unity within the Islamic world. The governors of different regions formed their own independent kingdoms. The Persians formed the Samanid dynasty which encompassed all of today's Afghanistan as well as large parts of Transoxiana (most of what is now known as Central Asian Republics, called *Ma Wara un Nahar* in Arabic) and Khorasan. Another Persian family called the Buyids, of Daylamite origins, ruled the rest of Iran. The Fatamid caliphate also came into existence, ruling initially over North Africa and Egypt, and slowly expanding into Syria, Yemen and Hijaz. Of all these independent empires, the Fatamid dynasty was the most powerful. It ruled for almost three hundred years, from 296 AH to 567 AH. On the other hand the Samanid empire declined quite fast, and a local governor of Ghazni (Afghanistan) called Sabuktigin formed an autonmous government in 366 AH which was later called the Ghaznavid Empire.

It was against this backdrop that the Seljuqi Turks began rising to power. The Seljuqis originated from the areas between Turkestan and China, and their larger tribes were very powerful in Turkestan. The ruler Yabghu greatly respected the Turk leader Dakak. When Dakak's son Seljuq grew up, his extraordinary talents and leadership skills astonished everyone. Yabghu was clever enough to appoint Seljuq as the commander of his army. Seljuq's quick rise through the ranks and his rapid successes gave birth to jealousy and conspiracies amongst members of the court. Many began to plot against him, and sensing the danger to himself, Seljuq left Turkestan with his tribes to settle instead under the rule of the Muslims, embracing

Islam. After succeeding in bringing order and organisation to his tribes, he began to advance slowly into Transoxiana. This area was populated mostly by Muslims under the rule of Yabghu, who demanded tribute from those living there. Soon Seljuq had won a significant number of battles, and a large area had fallen under his control. Thus he laid the foundations of the Seljuq Empire. He had four sons, of whom Arsalan and Mikail are the most famous for having sons that went on to become great sultans. The Seljuqi rulers of Iran and Iraq were his descendents. After Mikail's offspring, Arslan's children prospered as well. They formed their empire in Asia minor (modern day Anatolia), and the Ottoman Turks are their legacy.

To delve into some of the details, after Seljuq's death, his sons spread out into the various areas of Transoxiana. They clashed in bloody battles with the Ghaznavids, the rulers of Khwarzem and the rulers of Bukhara. The real reason for these repeated battles was that the surrounding rulers were intimidated by the growing power of the Seljuqs, and often initiated the fighting to distract and weaken the empire. Arslan was captured in one such battle with the Ghaznavids, and he died in captivity. Mikail was martyred in a fight against the non-Muslim Turks. He had three prominent sons: Tughril Beg, Chaghri Dawood and Yabghu. Tughril Beg was a consummate warrior, and he led his army against the Ghaznavids who had attacked the Seljuqs, afraid of their increasing power. Tughril, however, established a great defense, and defeated Masood I of Ghazni in a war that culminated in the Battle of Dandanaqan in 1040 CE (429 AH). The Seljuq empire was thus established in Khorasan, after which Tughril headed west and conquered most of Iran. In 447 AH he entered Baghdad which was then under the control of the Buyids, ridding the Abbasids of them. The Seljuqs had now emerged as a powerful empire, ranging from Khorasan to Persia and Iraq. In 423 AH, the Caliph in Baghdad summoned Tughril to his court, formally recognizing his right to rule and

granting him an affirming decree. Thus began the Seljuq dynasty.

All of Mikail's sons were included as rulers of the Seljuqi empire. Tughril Beg, Chaghri Dawood, Yabghu and their offspring were all entrusted with the rule of various areas of the empire. After Tughril's death, his nephew Alp Arslan, the son of Chaghri Dawood, became the Great Seljuq while the rest of the family governed the local areas they were responsible for. When Alp Arslan ascended the throne, it was Nizam al-Mulk who took it upon himself to help him maintain law and order of such a great empire. He did this so well that he is considered, to this day, as the greatest and wisest vizier of the Muslim history.

Nizam al-Mulk – The Wise Advisor

Nizam al-Mulk was not a traditional politician. Having been given the great responsibility of maintaining the order of an entire empire, he did not resort to the underhanded tactics that were frequently employed by his fellow courtiers to undermine their rivals and opponents. His chosen method was instead to focus all his energy, skills and experience into improving the governance and solving the problems of the people. He defeated his opponents not by conspiracies and manipulations, but by his outstanding performance. His wisdom and intelligence led him to suggest effective solutions to even the trickiest and most puzzling difficulties. He often used this to extract the sultan out of delicate situations, thus earning his favor and consequently having great influence over him. He gained extraordinary power and influence as vizier due to this.

His goal was not to maximise his personal interests by gaining power or position. He wanted a powerful and united Muslim empire instead of several dispersed Muslims states. A united Muslim empire was in the best collective interest of the Muslims as it could successfully defend them against the multiple non-Muslim forces of the time. He also wanted to

bring about peace and prosperity for the Muslims that lived under the empire's protection. It is considered a nigh impossible task to be a loyal companion to a king while remaining true to the values of a Muslim and safeguarding the rights of Muslim populace. Nizam al-Mulk, however, proved that it was indeed possible, and he has set a shining example for all Muslim advisors and viziers to follow.

Nizam al-Mulk was known for finding solutions that had the most advantages and the least disadvantages. When he rose to the rank of vizier, the matter under consideration was that the Caliph in Baghdad needed to be persuaded to recognize Alp Arslan as an autonomous Islamic ruler. Nizam al-Mulk suggested that the petitioner to the Caliph should be one whom the Caliph would find it hard to deny. Thus he convinced Tughril's wife, who also happened to be the Caliph's daughter, to go to Baghdad and petition her father to recognize Alp Arslan's right to rule. Tughril's wife was therefore sent with many gifts and courtesies to persuade the Caliph, who, as predicted, did not wish to refuse his daughter and awarded Alp Arslan the title of "Ziauddin 'Adad al-Dawla", thus approving his sultanate.

Nizam al-Mulk was always careful that relations with the caliphate in Baghdad should remain warm and friendly. He abhorred the idea of Muslims fighting each other over small slights or careless insults. Once Alp Arslan chose, as the ambassador to the caliphate, a man whose son had killed the Caliph's personal slave. The Caliph refused to receive the man or accept him as the Seljuq empire's ambassador. Alp Arslan was inclined to stand firm on his decision, which would have pitted two Muslim empires against each other. Nizam al-Mulk talked him down, convincing him that the right course of action would be to call back the previous ambassador and announce the appointment of a new one in order to preserve the friendship between the two powers. Alp Arslan acted on Nizam al-Mulk's

advice, and the Caliph in Baghdad immediately accepted the new appointment.

Good relations with neighbouring kingdoms had always been an issue for the Seljuq empire. To resolve this Nizam al-Mulk proposed that the sultan should continue the tradition of political marriages. The sultan arranged a marriage between his sister and Hazarasp, the governor of Basra, while he himself married the widowed daughter of Qadir Khan, the ruler of Kashgar. These marriages heralded peace for the people, and having built family ties, the sultans lived peacefully with each other.

As the caliphate in Baghdad had declined in power, Muslims had begun fighting amongst each other rather than fighting the non-Muslims. Thus much of the area had been split into tiny independent kingdoms. The Seljuq dynasty annexed these splinter countries into itself, and founded a strong, united empire which aimed to preserve the dignity of the caliphate in Baghdad rather than compete with it. The Seljuq empire bordered the Byzantine empire based in Constantinople. The Byzantine government naturally preferred to deal with several small, weak Muslim nations rather than a single united one, and they were always on the lookout for an opportunity to weaken the emerging Seljuq empire. The Seljuqs and the Byzantines were often engaged in skirmishes and minor conflicts, building up to an inevitable major confrontation. In 456 AH (1063 CE), Alp Arslan invaded Armenia and Georgia, where both his son and Nizam al-Mulk Tusi showed great bravery and skill in the battlefield, conquering multiple strongholds belonging to the enemy. Then Alp Arslan himself led the army's command and conquered one castle after the other, until a large portion of Georgia had been taken over. The ruler of Georgia agreed to a truce whose terms included a tribute paid each year to the Muslims. Thus the Byzantine empire, which demanded yearly tributes from Armenia and Georgia, received the message

clearly: the Seljuq empire was strong and not to be taken lightly.

In the summer of 1071 CE (463 AH), the emperor Romanos Diogenes undertook a massive campaign to engage the Seljuqs in a battle with a Byzantine army almost 300,000 large in revenge for the earlier invasion. With no time to prepare, Alp Arslan dispatched a brief army, numbering around 15,000 soldiers, which soundly defeated the Byzantines, confiscating the holy cross that the army had carried and sending it to Baghdad as a sign of victory. In retaliation, the Byzantines raided and took the fortress of Ahlat from the Muslims, but the very next day, the Muslims had retaken the fortress.

Alp Arslan was not inclined to prolong the conflict. The confrontation had been sparked by the Byzantines, and now that the Seljuqs had clearly repelled them and made a show of power, he sent the Byzantine emperor an offer of truce. Romanos, however, scoffed at the offer and replied with the message that “the only truce will be one arranged when we have reached your throne”. The fighting began once more. At the battle of Manizkert, the Byzantine army was dealt an ignominious defeat by the Muslims, who prevailed even though outnumbered by the Romans. Romanos was taken prisoner, and was ransomed for a huge amount of money. A peace treaty was agreed upon, resolving that instead of fighting the Muslims, the emperor would send aid to the Seljuqs if they needed it against their other enemies. It was also agreed that all Muslims that had been taken prisoner during the war would be released. As the ten year long treaty was being signed, Nizam al-Mulk ensured that all the captives, including the emperor and priests, were treated with hospitality and dignity, even honoring them with gifts when released. This was to ensure that they would become sympathetic towards the Muslims, and perhaps act as allies once they returned to court, benefitting the Seljuqs.

The treaty, unfortunately, could not be upheld properly due to a coup in the Byzantine capital which resulted in Romanos being overthrown and a change in leadership. Therefore, some amount of conflict with the Byzantine empire continued. However, the war and the subsequent Muslim victory reminded the surrounding Christian kingdoms, always on the lookout for an opportunity to attack the Muslims, that the Seljuqs were a force to be reckoned with.

Nizam al-Mulk always believed in being kind after a show of power had subdued the enemy, because he considered it the most effective way to bring someone to your side. Unlike most conquerors of his time, Nizam al-Mulk did not believe in conquest for the sake of conquest. He knew that the important thing to do after winning a land is to win the hearts of the people, to improve and advance the administration and infrastructure of the area, and to genuinely make it a part of the empire. If nothing but further conquests follow the annexation of a land, the conquered people feel only resentment towards their occupiers, which leads to conflict, revolt and bloodshed. Thus after the conquest of Anatolia, Nizam al-Mulk did not attempt to advance further. Instead, he focused on and succeeded in winning the hearts of the people who had been conquered. That is the main reason why, even now, Anatolia is a Muslim-majority land.

After having mitigated the urgent internal and external dangers to the empire, Nizam al-Mulk turned his attention to the future. Using his influence he managed to arrange the Friday sermon read in the grand mosques of Makkah and Madinah to be read in the name of the Abbasid caliph. This was a particularly clever move, because these two cities have always been the spiritual and religious centers for Muslims all over the world. At the time, as the Fatimids and Ismailis dominated over much of the Muslim nation including Egypt and modern day Saudi Arabia, the Friday sermon was being read in their name. Thus

Shia beliefs were spreading alarmingly fast, while the Sunnis were rather weak politically, and their sects too mired in conflict with each other to properly combat the spread of Shia philosophy.

Nizam al-Mulk realized that this could become a serious problem for the Sunnis in the coming years, and he had already begun to think of a peaceful way to prevent the Shia beliefs from taking hold. His strong political insight led him to the conclusion that the Fatimids, although appearing to be strong and majestic, had begun to weaken internally due to a combination of administrative and financial problems. Thus the citizens of Makkah and Madinah were already growing dissatisfied with the aristocrats and the government. The Seljuq dynasty, by contrast, was seen as a rising star and impressed everyone with its power and grandeur.

Using this as an opportunity, Nizam al-Mulk met with the local governor of Makkah, Muhammad bin Abi Hashim, in 462 AH. The meeting was warm and pleasant, and the governor was treated with utmost respect and honor. Nizam al-Mulk convinced him during this meeting to break from the Fatimid empire and give his allegiance to Alp Arslan instead. Muhammad bin Abi Hashim was willing to be persuaded, and he agreed to arrange for the Friday sermons in Makkah and Madinah to be read in the Seljuqs' name. Soon the surrounding areas had adopted the same behavior, and the region began to break free of Shia influence. The Fatimid dynasty, indeed weakened by its internal affairs, could not afford to confront the Seljuqs and allowed the areas to slip out of their sphere of influence. Thus Nizam al-Mulk succeeded in averting a great potential conflict with peaceful means without any bloodshed due to his clever strategy and political insight.

Malik Shah's Rule – the Height of Nizam al-Mulk's Power

In 458 AH Alp Arslan formally named his son Malik Shah as the heir to the throne. During an invasion of Transoxiana in 465 AH a castellan was captured and brought before Alp Arslan. The castellan was defiant and insolent, and Alp Arslan ordered him to be punished. Before he could be taken away, he lunged forward and attacked the sultan, administering a fatal wound. Alp Arslan died at the young age of 40, having ruled only for ten years.

Before this attack Alp Arslan had asked Nizam al-Mulk to remain faithful to his son after he died, and to help him with the ruling of the empire. At the time of Alp Arslan's death Nizam al-Mulk and Malik Shah were both away on a campaign in Turkistan. Upon receiving the news of his death, Nizam al-Mulk immediately ordered the army to turn back to the capital, Rey, postponing the Turkistan campaign. As soon as he got back, he arranged for Malik Shah's coronation, accepting oaths of allegiance from the military commanders and the various members of the nobility. With great haste, Nizam al-Mulk also had the caliphate in Baghdad confirm Malik Shah's ascension, so that the sermons could be read in his name. He also sent news of Malik Shah's coronation alongside the news of Alp Arslan's death to the surrounding areas, in an attempt to forestall any invasion by foreign powers. Finally, the army might have posed a threat to the young king, so Nizam al-Mulk ordered an increase of 700,000 dinars in the military's salaries, thus pleasing and placating the army.

These quick steps were hugely successful in averting the chaos and rebellion that often accompanied a change in power. Alp Arslan's nephew Qavurt Beg attempted to claim the throne and start a rebellion against Malik Shah, but Nizam al-Mulk eliminated the threat he posed before he could gain much

momentum. If Nizam al-Mulk had been at all slow in ensuring a swift transfer of power, the empire would almost certainly have fallen into civil war, greatly harming the interests of the Muslims as whole. Thus Nizam al-Mulk played a vital role in stabilizing the kingdom while fulfilling his oath of allegiance to the young sultan.

On a number of other occasions Nizam al-Mulk's actions prevented the empire from falling into civil war and internal conflict. One such situation occurred when Malik Shah's uncle claimed in court that he had letters from various military officers swearing allegiance to him if he made a play for the throne. He declared that he wanted to read the letters out loud to the court. Incensed at the claim, Malik Shah commanded Nizam al-Mulk to take the bundle of letters from his uncle and read them aloud to see if there was any truth in what he said. Nizam al-Mulk took the letters as ordered, but instead of reading them aloud, he threw them into the nearby fireplace. He knew that if the claims were proven true, the military officers involved would have to be heavily punished for treason, and this could lead to a revolt by the army. The best way to deal with the matter was to not let it gain any importance. Malik Shah knew that Nizam al-Mulk always had a wise reason for his actions, so he did not openly object to the disobedience, and the empire was saved from a potential rebellion.

Having such a capable minister at his disposal meant that Malik Shah had much time at his hand for hunting and other sports. His skilled second-in-command had taken all his burdens and duties upon himself, and did such an excellent job that the entire empire, spreading from the holy land of Jerusalem to China was peaceful and prosperous. It does not mean that Malik Shah was incapable of running his kingdom; rather, his minister was even more talented and competent at doing so.

Nizam al-Mulk had a habit of rescuing Malik Shah from dangerous situations that could have led to terrible outcomes. Once when the caesar of the Roman empire had invaded the Seljuq kingdom, Malik Shah led the army to confront him. During a lull in the hostilities, Malik Shah left the army outpost with a few of his companions to hunt, and was apprehended by Roman soldiers who took him and his companions back to their camp as captives. Dressed in civilian clothing, Malik Shah was unrecognizable as the sultan, and the soldiers did not realize who they had captured. When Nizam al-Mulk found out what had happened, he ensured that the information was kept quiet in the Muslim army camp. He gave the impression that the sultan had returned to the camp, then calmly arranged a meeting with the caesar. During the meeting, Nizam al-Mulk was utterly relaxed, not allowing his words or his demeanour to betray how anxious he was. If the caesar discovered just who it was that he had captured, the Romans would have great leverage and their position would become vastly more favorable.

Nizam al-Mulk kept control of his emotions and had a serene conversation with the caesar about a variety of matters. At the end of the talk, the caesar mentioned carelessly that a few of the soldiers from the Muslim army had been found and captured, and offered to release them to Nizam al-Mulk. When the captives, including Malik Shah, were brought to him, Nizam al-Mulk publicly and rather severely reprimanded the soldiers for their foolishness in wandering into enemy territory for the sake of a hunting trip. Then he swiftly took his leave of the caesar, taking with him the released prisoners and bringing the sultan safely back to his army. When the Roman caesar later found out what had actually transpired, he was astonished and awed at Nizam al-Mulk's brilliant handling of such a precarious situation.

Allah (SWT) had given Nizam al-Mulk the rare ability to know what needs to be done at any given moment. He had the wisdom

to take small steps to prevent huge catastrophes. After the conquest of Samarkand, Malik Shah had invaded Kashgar (a city in modern China) when the Roman delegate requested permission to come to the capital to pay the yearly tribute. Nizam al-Mulk instructed him to travel to Kashgar instead and arranged for the tribute to be received there. The reasoning behind this was that the delegate would have to travel the breadth of the Seljuq empire to reach Kashgar, and the vastness and the grandeur of the empire would awe and intimidate him. When he would narrate his first-hand impressions to the caesar of Rome and his court it would have a more profound effect on them and they would likely hesitate before attacking the Muslims again.

Nizam al-Mulk's Care for the Common People

Immersed in the cutthroat world of politics as he was, Nizam al-Mulk never forgot that his first responsibility was to the people of the land. Once when Alp Arslan was facing financial difficulties because of conflict with the Byzantine empire, he decided to impose an extra tax on the people to fund it. The news of the impending tax distressed the people. Harvest season was still far off, and a plague had spread through much of the empire, killing people left and right. One day in court, Alp Arslan commented with sorrow that the plague was an enemy that could not be stopped, neither by the army nor by money. Nizam al-Mulk had been awaiting just such an opportunity. He said,

"Yes, only justice and compassion can eliminate such a foe."

He went on to present several examples from history to prove that it was often the tyranny and oppression of the kings that acted as a curse upon the whole kingdom. Alp Arslan was listening attentively and taking his words to heart, so Nizam al-Mulk added that if the sultan wanted to be a blessing and not a curse upon his empire, he could make some overtures of

kindness to his people. Alp Arslan was convinced, and he withdrew his previous decision to impose an extra tax on the people.

Nizam al-Mulk placed great importance on the dispensation of justice to the people. He worked to ensure easy access to justice for people from all walks of life, and made certain that the justice was swift and immediate. In his book '*Dastur al-Wuzara*' (roughly translated as 'Code of Conduct for Viziers'), he writes that it is a commandment from Allah that your rulings must be just. If even a single decision is unfair or against the will of Allah, then not even a hundred years of fair ruling will be sufficient enough to make up for the sin.

Nizam al-Mulk detested the difficulties that people commonly faced when trying to meet government officials. His own subordinates had instructions to allow the people an audience with him whenever someone came with a petition or request. Once he was eating his meal when a woman arrived with a petition for him. The guards stopped her from entering until he had finished his meal. When Nizam al-Mulk found out, he was very displeased and reprimanded the guards, saying that their purpose was to serve the people, especially the poor and the needy. Privileged people could usually gain access through their resources and influence, but the less privileged deserved access to their rulers too.

Nizam al-Mulk often used his position and influence to sway the sultan to his point of view when it came to the welfare of the peasantry and the common people. He put a definitive end to regressive, unfair taxes which burdened the poor more than the rich. He ordered wells, reservoirs and irrigation channels to be built across the empire to improve ease of access to clean water for drinking and agriculture. He arranged for hospitable inns to be built on the major streets frequented by pilgrims in order to make the pilgrimage easier for the Muslims. To improve

infrastructure he ordered a network of paved roads to be laid throughout the empire, as well as sturdy bridges built across rivers. He had a special passion for constructing mosques everywhere. He also built lush gardens in various regions to improve the beauty of the land. As a result people became happy and prosperous.

History teaches us that when the people are happy and prosperous, and the rulers are genuine in their wish to rule fairly and please the people, peace and security follow automatically. Thus it was that under Nizam al-Mulk's administration, people's lives and properties were safe and secure across the kingdom. The people slept safely in their beds at night, not fearing for themselves or their family or their possessions. Beyond all this, however, perhaps the greatest service Nizam al-Mulk did for his people was in the field of education. To understand the importance of his actions, it is first necessary to have an idea of what the state of education was in the Muslim world before Nizam al-Mulk's arrival on the scene. A summary is presented here from Dr Ahmad Shalabi's book 'History of Muslim Education'.

Brief Overview of the Muslim Education System Before 5th Century Hijri

Examining the history of Islam tells us that since the very beginning, there was a great thirst for knowledge amongst the Muslims. Here a question arises. Why were the early Muslims so keen to gain knowledge, when before the advent of Islam, Arabs as a nation were largely illiterate? It is narrated that there were perhaps only 17 literate people in Makkah at the time of the first revelation. However, the oral tradition was exceptionally strong among the Arabs. The ancient Arab trade fairs held at 'Ukaz, Majna and Zu al-Majaz were famous for their poetry contests and debates, but the topics under discussion were limited to legends about their ancestors, love

stories, Arabian history and the reciting of pedigrees and family trees.

After Islam rose to prominence, there were a great many changes in the various aspects of life in Arabia, and education was no different. The reason for this can be traced back to the importance of seeking knowledge in Islam, and Prophet Muhammad's particular instructions regarding education. The Prophet (SAW) himself set an example in this regard; several of the captives from the Battle of Badr were released upon the condition that they would educate a select number of Muslims and teach them to read and write – this would be their ransom payment. Multiple sayings of the Prophet (SAW) exalting the importance of knowledge and describing the clear superiority of the scholar over the ignorant sparked a tendency in Muslims to favour and encourage the growth of knowledge. In the Quran, Allah Himself orders the Prophet (SAW) to pray for enhancement in his knowledge. The trend thus started by the Prophet himself continued after him during the Rashidun Caliphate. Afterwards, the Umayyads continued on the same path and it peaked at the time of the Abbasids who proved themselves to be true benefactors of knowledge and education.

In the early era of Islamic history, the knowledge of Quran was considered the basic field of education. To pursue education and to learn to read and write, students would travel to the teacher's house and attend him or her there. The centers or houses where a teacher taught their students were called '*kuttab*'. Imam Shafa'i mentions such a center, "My mother sent me to a *kuttab*, and after I had finished the Quran I entered the mosque (for further education)."

Soon the number of *kuttab* and teachers in the Islamic world began to rise rapidly. Other than the *kuttab*, the mosques held special significance as centers of education. Several companions of the Prophet had their own literary circles in the

main mosques of various areas. Abdullah bin Abbas (RA) held *tafsir* (Quranic explanation) lectures in Masjid al-Haram in Makkah every Thursday. Abdullah bin Umar (RA) gave lectures in Madinah, Ma'adh bin Jabal (RA) in Yemen, Abu Musa Ash'ari (RA) in Basra, Abdullah bin Mas'ood (RA) in Kufa, 'Ubada bin Samit (RA) in Syria, and Abu Darda (RA) and Abdullah bin 'Amr bin Aas (RA) gave lectures at the local mosques in Egypt. The same passion for seeking knowledge continued in the next two generations of the *taba'een* (companions of the companions) and their companions, *taba' taba'een*, with the mosques as the center of knowledge and education. Masjid an-Nabawi, for example, was the venue of Imam Rabia Rai and Imam Malik's lectures.

As time went on, religious education came to include more than the recitation and explanation of the Quran. It involved the Quran's interpretation, the science of Hadith (sayings, actions or silent approvals of the Prophet) and jurisprudence. Apart from the Arabic language, the fields of history and medicine also began to increase in importance. The second caliph Umar (RA) particularly instructed that children should be educated in archery, horse riding, famous quotations and good quality poetry. Mathematics and calligraphy soon gained a place in the field of education as their importance grew. It was considered essential for a scholar to be educated in these basic fields before they could be considered learned.

This increase in the areas of learning meant that it was no longer feasible for all the classes to be held in the mosque. Some of the activities could be potentially disruptive to the solemn atmosphere of the mosque. Thus religious education remained centered in the mosques, while the other fields of education tended to have experts that taught in their homes to where students traveled in order to learn from them. To learn the pure eloquence of the Arabic language, the best practice was to stay for a while with the bedouins in the desert who spoke

pure Arabic uncontaminated by the city dialects. Imam Shafa'i spent several years with the bedouin precisely for this purpose.

The state sponsorship of education began because the caliphs of the time often preferred the company of scholars and learned men. From the time of caliph Mu'aawiyah (661-680 C.E.) scholars were invited to court to discuss topics such as the history of various nations and foreign rulers. These scholars would also give their advice on a range of issues. The Umayyad caliphs began to appoint tutors for the young princes who would often live in the palace and teach the princes the knowledge of Quran as well as poetry, history, public speaking, eloquence and quotes of wise men. These tutors were not only responsible for the education of these princes but also for their moral growth, to teach them ethics, etiquettes and manners.

During the Umayyad rule many learned scholars and respected wisemen began to avoid going to the palace because of the sheer opulence, royal protocol and the disregard for Islamic teachings that was reflected in the manners of the court. Later, the Abbasids followed in the Umayyad footsteps and provoked much the same reaction of repulsion and avoidance amongst Islamic scholars and wisemen. They refused to come to the palace to educate the princes in the worldly or religious sciences. When the famous caliph Harun al-Rashid attempted to appoint prominent scholars as private tutors for his sons, they insisted that the princes should join the regular classes and be educated amongst the rest of the students.

The Fatimids subsequently found a solution to this conundrum by establishing classes in the palace for young men of the nobility to be educated *madrassa* style. The teachers were paid handsome salaries, and this trend became so popular that the royal palaces became a hub for education and knowledge. Mamun al-Rashid's court was bustling with tutors, educators, translators and historians. This tradition was cherished and

continued by all coming successors - the Ghaznavid sultans, the Tulunids and the Seljuqs. The king's court would always be full of philosophers, mathematicians, lawmakers and physicians, all sponsored and supported by the royal coffers.

Other than the houses of the teachers, the mosques and the royal palaces, bookstores were yet another hotspot of knowledge and education. The fairs and festivals so popular in Arabia before the advent of Islam had been replaced with such book markets. They first became popular in the Abbasid reign. Al-Ya'qoubi writes that one area of Baghdad boasted more than a hundred bookstores. These bookstores were often the sites of spirited debates on one topic or the other. Copies of original books were also done painstakingly in these bookstores. Prominent scholars like Al-Jahiz would pay for the opportunity to be locked into one of these bookshops overnight, where they could read whatever book they wanted to their heart's content, and to make copies of whatever sections they liked. The market of Baghdad has been mentioned by Ibn al-Jawzi and the market of Cairo (*Souq al-Waraqeen*) by Al-Maqrizi, teeming with scholars and students eager for knowledge.

In addition to bookstores, libraries were also a center of educational activities. The Abbasid caliphs were the forerunners in this endeavour, and it was Harun al-Rashid who established the *Bayt al-Hikma* (The House of Wisdom), which became a major intellectual center of the Islamic world. It was not merely a library housing a vast number of books, but also a hub for the translation of books from various languages and a research center for scientific discoveries. These libraries grew so prevalent that every noble and commoner with love of knowledge was racing to have a private library of their own. Not only did the major cities of Shiraz, Cordoba and Cairo possess great libraries, but smaller cities also had a number of them. The Fatimid's greatest library was housed in an enormous building with forty rooms, each of which could store up to

18,000 books. Dr. Ahmad Shalabi writes about this love for knowledge:

“In 355 A.H. the Khorasani soldiers had annihilated the vizier Ibn al-Ameed’s palace so badly that not even a single pitcher or glass remained unbroken. At such a time, Ibn al-Ameed was weighed down with grief and worry about the state of his library, of which no news had reached him. When the library’s custodian and famous scholar Ibn Miskawayh arrived to inform him that the books had been rescued without damage, Ibn al-Ameed lit up with pleasure, saying ‘You have brought joyful news. All other things can be replaced.’”

The tradition of collecting books and rare manuscripts had become so prevalent in Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) that even peasant farmers had a library room in their houses. Like modern libraries, these libraries were fully catalogued and each book properly indexed, available for loan to others against a deposit. If a science or literature expert required quick access to a book, they were allowed to enter the library even outside public hours. The larger libraries employed scribes and translators for the express purpose of copying and translating manuscripts. The great library of the Banu Ammar emirs of Tripoli (in modern day Libya) had around 180 scribes employed to make copies of manuscripts. Of those 30 were appointed on the night shift so that the scribing process could continue 24 hours a day.

It was important to create an encouraging environment for education as the times changed and culture and civilisation grew and prospered. This was done by arranging for the scholarships and residence of students, and setting up salaries for the teachers who dedicated their lives to spreading knowledge. People eager for knowledge travelled thousands of miles to reach the centers of knowledge and science, and to benefit from the great, prominent scholars of the time. It was a logistical nightmare to arrange for their food and board, and to arrange

classes in a way that was practically feasible and yet not too time-consuming for an individual. It was too inefficient to visit different areas of a city to learn from various experts in their respective fields, so the tradition of a *madrassa* was begun.

Initially, the few *madrassas* that were founded were dedicated to the religious education of a particular school of jurisprudence. Then the Fatimids founded several *madrassas* with the intention of encouraging Shiite beliefs throughout their kingdom. When the Seljuqs conquered Baghdad and an effort was made to renew the Sunni beliefs, the *madrassas* were seen as essential to this endeavour. Nizam al-Mulk dedicated himself to the establishing of such *madrassas* with the support of Alp Arslan and then Malik Shah. Soon a whole network of *madrassas* had been laid down across the empire. Nizam al-Mulk's campaign of opening *madrassas* in every area of the entire kingdom was so effective that this achievement alone is enough to cement his place in history.

The Nezamiyyah Institutes: Nizam al-Mulk's Incredible Achievement and a Great Education Movement

Nizam al-Mulk was not just a brilliant statesman and a political thinker; he was also a great believer in the importance of education and seeking knowledge. He enjoyed the company of scholars and learned men. He was particularly interested in learning the Hadith sciences. He would also lecture occasionally in Baghdad and Khorasan on Hadith. Before his appointment as minister, many scholars had been banished from their domiciles due to political complications. Nizam al-Mulk put in a lot of effort to have them return safely to their centers to continue their work. Such scholars included the Imam of the grand mosques in Makkah and Madinah as well as prominent scholar Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri. Nizam al-Mulk had great admiration for these people, often standing to invite them to sit in his place, and sitting cross-legged in front of them to indicate respect. It

was this regard for knowledge that led Nizam al-Mulk to accomplish a feat which would name him the founder of *madrassas* in golden ink in the pages of history.

Nizam al-Mulk believed that the process of teaching and learning for students and teachers should be made as easy and convenient as possible. The lack of facilities, the long, arduous journeys, and the shortage of supplies often made it impossible for those involved to dedicate themselves to the act of gaining and dispensing knowledge as much as they would like. He felt severely the need for an institution where the environment could be focused completely on knowledge, and where enough facilities were available so that the students and the teachers would need not worry about anything other than their work. These institutes needed to be in every corner of the land, so that those who sought knowledge would not have to travel long and hard just to find an opportunity to learn.

Starting on his scheme, Nizam al-Mulk founded institutes of education in Nishapur, Balkh, Herat, Isfahan, Basra, Merv, Mosul and in every major city in Iraq. He established a *madrassa* and a library in every town inhabited by a prominent or known scholar. According to a tradition, he established *madrassas* and libraries in locations as far off as Jazirat Ibn Umar (modern day island Cizre in Anatolia, Turkey). Named after him, the institutes or *madrassas* began to be called Nezamiyyah institutes. These institutes were financially supported either by Nizam al-Mulk personally or through the properties that the state granted to be held in trust (endowed or made Waqf) for the institute. These properties included land, buildings, shops and other income generating assets. Only the best tutors were chosen to teach at the Nezamiyyah institutes, and they were paid a handsome salary. Students were granted generous scholarships. Just Baghdad boasted around 30 *madrassas*, and the buildings of the *madrassas* were often as

grand and majestic as the palace itself, meant to awe and humble visitors and seekers of knowledge.

One day Malik Shah commented on the huge wealth that Nizam al-Mulk tended to spend on the Nezamiyyah institutes, saying, "If you spent the money that you dedicate to these institutes on the army instead, we could conquer the whole world." Nizam al-Mulk replied, "The army you would recruit could only reach a couple of miles with each arrow they shoot. But the army of scholars that I am training, their prayers have the ability to cross the heavens."

The most famous and celebrated of all the Nezameyyah institutes was the main branch in Baghdad. Its construction began in 457 AH (1065 CE), and was completed two years later at the enormous cost of 200,000 dinars. It was the largest institute of higher education of the time, and could fit hundreds of thousands of people. Its library hosted millions of books, including the entire personal collection of Nizam al-Mulk himself. Rare and valuable books were collected from all over the world to grace the shelves of the library.

Abu Ishaq Shirazi, a prominent scholar of the time, was selected as the head of the *madrassa.* On the day of its inauguration, Abu Ishaq was late in arriving at the institute. Nizam al-Mulk's son, who was in charge of the event, waited a little while and then started the ceremony without the scholar's presence. When Nizam al-Mulk found out, he disapproved of his son's decision, saying, "You made the wrong decision. It would have been better to delay the inauguration of the *madrassa* for as long as needed, even an entire year. No one but Abu Ishaq can be chosen for this post." Thus Abu Ishaq was cajoled and persuaded until he agreed, twenty days later, to take up the job of leading the institute. Nizam al-Mulk understood very well that to begin important work without competent and skilled people is to limit its potential benefit. If time, effort, money or

personal pride needs to be sacrificed to obtain the cooperation of such people then it is a sacrifice well worth making.

There are many details available describing the glory and splendour of the Nezamiyyah of Baghdad. Here was an opportunity for students to fully dedicate themselves to the pursuit of knowledge. Food, clothing, residence, transport – all were provided for. The magnificent library was available at all times. The curriculum focused on religious studies, Islamic law, interpretation of the Quran, jurisprudence, grammar and literature, the art of debate, history and geography. Students could specialize in any of these subjects. The entire aura of the institute, and in particular the library, was awe-inspiring and impressive. Scribes, clerks and custodians of the library were in a constant flurry, busy taking care of the books and adding more to the collection. There was also a center of *fatwas*, called Dar-ul-Ifta, where the public could come in to ask questions and discuss their problems, and receive religious guidance in return. Preachers and public speakers also addressed the people and gave lectures on relevant topics within the building of the Nezamiyyah institute.

Other than the Nezamiyyah of Baghdad, the Nezamiyyah of Nishapur was also a prominent and celebrated *madrassa* of the time. The head of the institute was Ziauddin al-Juwaini, a prominent theologian who had also served as imam of the grand mosques in Makkah and Madinah. He taught at the institute for 30 years.

For a long time, these *madrassas* spread the light of knowledge to those who sought it. The Nezamiyyah of Baghdad was destroyed some 200 years later during the Mongol invasion, but other *madrassas* managed to stay standing in the centuries to come. In his book “History of Muslim Education”, Dr. Ahmad Shalabi has compiled a list of prominent and known figures who served as teachers in the Nezamiyyah institutes. From the

5th century Hijri to the end of the 8th century, the list shines with the names of inspiring personalities, including Imam Ghazali and Abu Abdullah al-Tabari. After the 9th century, mentions of these institutes fade out of history books. The reason for this is that financial crises caused due to in-fighting and civil wars led to the repossession of the Awqaf (endowed properties) that had been granted to the *madrassas*. This severe cut in funding caused a tremendous shock to the structure and facilities of the institutes, and they never recovered, gradually vanishing from existence.

The *madrassas* found by Nizam al-Mulk do not exist anymore, but the good they did and the benefits they produced endure in many forms. The *madrassas* that exist today in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have been inspired from the legacy the Nezamiyyah institutes left behind. However, their curricula need to be updated and brought in line with the contemporary sciences, as was the case during the time of Nizam al-Mulk.

Siyasatnama – an Unparalleled Treatise on Politics and Statecraft

As the Seljuq dynasty grew and expanded its borders, the sultan Malik Shah began to feel the need for a book that could serve as a guide and a reference; a book that outlined the principles of governance while also standing as the constitution of the nation. He tasked his ministers Sharf al-Mulk, Majd al-Mulk and Nizam al-Mulk to write a book for this purpose, which all three of them did. The book compiled by Nizam al-Mulk was the only one that met with Malik Shah's approval, and was consequently accepted as the constitution of the empire.

The book, written shortly before Nizam al-Mulk's death, gained real recognition and prominence only after he had passed away. Siyasatnama, also known as "Siyar al-Muluk", consists of 50 chapters. It describes in detail what factors lie behind political

success, and what steps are necessary to ensure stability and peace in a country. In this context Nizam al-Mulk expands at length on topics like desirable characteristics in a king, the privileges and duties of a king, the realities of governing, the responsibilities and challenges facing the ministers of a country, and the process behind selecting good administrators and bureaucrats to run the country. It covers the proper role of other governmental agencies like the armed forces, police, finance department, secret services, etc. It discusses guideline principles and codes for each.

Siyasatnama is easy to read and understand. Despite the heavy topics, the average reader does not feel a sense of boredom, nor does the book come across as dry, heavy reading. Instead, Nizam al-Mulk's eloquence and fluency keep the reader engaged and interested. He does not merely present his arguments on a particular principle or rule, but offers historical events and facts to support his claims. Thus the book is littered with historical references to events in both Muslim and non-Muslim histories, focusing specially on the ancient empires of Persia and Turkey. He also includes frequent quotes from the Quran and Hadith as well as insightful quotes from wisemen, mystics and ascetics.

The truth of the matter is that Nizam al-Mulk's book can be considered a guide and a manual for Muslim leaders and politicians of all times. Politics is generally thought to be void of all honour and principles; it is considered an area where anything goes, and all rules and morals may be ignored if needed. Nizam al-Mulk's book shows how decent, honourable men can and should conduct themselves in the muddy waters of the political arena, and that is the reason that this book gained as much fame amongst non-Muslims as it did amongst Muslims. It has been translated into almost all the major European languages, and the British actually included it as part of the

curriculum for civil service training in the Indian subcontinent after its colonisation.

Nizam al-Mulk – a Great Political Thinker

Nizam al-Mulk occupies a place of honour amongst the greatest political thinkers of all times. This is because he was not just a man of theory but carried with him almost 30 years of experience in the real world of politics. He examined and studied the rise and fall of various governments for years, and remained involved in the administration and management of his country even as power changed hands. Thus he had the unique opportunity to experience and witness practical politics from a very close perspective, and this sets him apart from other famous political philosophers like al-Farabi and al-Mawardi.

In his book Siyasatnama, Nizam al-Mulk deems the rulers of a country as a reflection of the character of the common people they rule over. He says with great certainty that inept kings are imposed upon immoral people. Under their reign, the country falls apart and becomes rife with bloodshed, robberies and unrest. In the turmoil of this punishment, both good and bad people alike suffer and die. This does not last forever, however, and in His mercy Allah SWT sends after a while a better ruler who ends the oppression and suffering, and brings about positive changes.

Nizam al-Mulk does not make the king accountable to the common people, but he warns him to follow Allah's commands closely and to beware that he will have to answer to Allah for all his actions and decisions. Both ideologically and practically, Nizam al-Mulk wants to see the king as a faithful and practicing Muslim. In his opinion the king need not be a great scholar himself, but he should be a friend to knowledge and scholarship, and a promoter of science and arts, of education and advancement. A love for his people, along with an affinity

with the poor people and a desire to help them, are also vital characteristics of the ideal king.

Along with all these traits, the king should also be courageous and resolute. Above all, he emphasizes again and again that the king should be fair and just. Nizam al-Mulk says that justice in a kingdom strengthens the empire and the king himself. An unjust and oppressive king cannot retain his power or his throne for long. Nizam al-Mulk considers it the direct responsibility of the king to establish justice in his kingdom. He presents Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) (AS) as well as Prophet Muhammad's companion Umar (RA) as shining examples of just rulers. He reminds the ruler of the huge honour and favor that Allah (SWT) has promised for rulers and kings who govern their people justly, and recommends that they always keep it in mind.

Other than the establishment of justice, Nizam al-Mulk places great emphasis on consultation and council. He says that the king is obliged to take first the council of the Quran and Hadith, and then the opinions of experienced, wise people. The king should spend time in the company of learned people and scholars, respecting them and heeding their advice. Scholars should also be willing to give sincere and wise advice to the king so that the king does not stray from the path of the righteous. In matters where the Shari'ah is silent the expert opinions of professionals should be sought to shape laws and regulations. Once a set of laws has been formulated with careful attention towards divine laws and the public interest, the people should not have the right to denigrate the law or to refuse to obey. The law should be enforced fully, and those who break it should be held immediately accountable.

Nizam al-Mulk repeatedly reminds the king that he should choose the best people to run his country and its administration. He believes that even with the best and most competent king, the kingdom is bound to fail to prosper if the king is surrounded

by greedy and inept officials. Nizam al-Mulk claims that capable and skilled servants are more useful than one's own sons. He advises the king to choose each official according to their skills and talents. He advises never to appoint one person to more than one post as this may affect his performance. He also opposes the posting of non-Muslims to the most essential and important posts of the kingdom.

He firmly reminds the king that he and the other leaders of the country must be of the highest moral standing and character, else the state will suffer. For this reason it is vital to avoid the company of comedians, singers, poets and shallow people. He also warns that it is sheer folly to be lax about the officials and administrators of the government. The king should keep a vigilant eye on their actions, knowing that any oppression or injustice on their part will also be on the king's shoulders on the Day of Judgement. If there are complaints against the appointed officials, the king should be just and fair in his judgment and refrain from unfairly siding with his officials. He also advises that keeping an official post for a long time can lead to treason, conspiracy and rebellions, so it is best not to leave an official at a particular post for more than three years in a row.

Nizam al-Mulk warns the king that shedding the blood of his own people always leads to destabilizing the country and should be avoided at all costs. However, he also advises that murder is a crime that should not be forgiven. The king should separate the judicial system from the administration of the government and ensure that the judges are free to cast their judgments with the administration fully cooperating with the judiciary. This, he believes, is the only way to establish justice in the country.

Nizam al-Mulk further advises the king that if he wants his people to love him, he should not burden them with a multitude of taxes, nor allow unnecessary force and cruelty when taxes are being collected. If the people report such cruelty, their reports

and complaints should be heard and taken seriously. If the king succeeds in protecting the lives, wealth and reputation of the people he serves, they will love him and pray for him, which will in turn strengthen the kingdom even more.

Another important factor in maintaining a strong kingdom is that the salaries of civil servants and officials must be paid regularly and on time. To prevent a rebellion from the army, it is useful to mix soldiers from different ethnicities and racial groups together as this reduces the chances of them forming a faction to plot against the king. Nizam al-Mulk cautions the king to always remain alert and on the look-out for any danger. He should be acutely aware of the important happenings in other countries, especially in those that are enemies. Thus ambassadors and diplomats to other countries should be chosen with great care, picking people who are competent and shrewd, and able to gather military information as well as political knowledge.

In the end, Nizam al-Mulk reminds the king that kingship is given as a great honor from Allah, but it is also a great responsibility and is a test. If the king fails to abide by the Shari'ah in personal and collective spheres, is unable to dispense justice or cannot ensure public welfare, he will have to endure a severe punishment in the Hereafter. In another similar book that Nizam al-Mulk wrote for the viziers, called Dastur al-Wuzara, he gives similar instructions and advice. He states that being a vizier is a very dangerous job, because a single piece of bad advice or a little bit of carelessness can lead to injustice and oppression, for which the vizier will be held accountable by Allah. He expresses the opinion that if the vizier is not astute, sincere, wise, an expert on history, or a hard worker willing to spend his life in service of the people, then he may very well cause the destruction of the kingdom, the king, and the people. Thus he instructs his children not to seek such a position.

Conspiracies and Suspension

History shows that conflict over succession in a kingdom most often leads to disaster for the state, and the same happened to the Seljuqs. Malik Shah's wife Terken Khatun wanted her own son, who was quite young, to be the heir to the throne. Nizam al-Mulk did not like the interference of women in state business, and he believed that Malik Shah's elder son Barkiyaruq was more suited to the position, being a sensible and capable man. Malik Shah himself preferred his elder son for the position of the heir but he could not bring himself to go entirely against the wishes of Terken Khatun. Terken Khatun herself was so invested in seeing her ambitions come to fulfillment that she had recruited another important vizier of Malik Shah, Taj al-Mulk, to her cause. Taj al-Mulk was deeply jealous of Nizam al-Mulk, and Terken Khatun had promised him that she would arrange for him to replace Nizam al-Mulk if he supported her son's bid for heirdom. Thus the two joined forces.

Terken Khatun began to whisper in Malik Shah's ears about the threat that Nizam al-Mulk posed to the kingdom. She warned him that Nizam al-Mulk had too much control over the kingdom, spent the kingdom's treasury too freely in useless pursuits, and deliberately awarded high positions in the court to his relatives in order to increase his own power and influence. She suggested that it would be prudent to reduce his power and remove him from his position of influence. The sultan began to believe his wife and started treating Nizam al-Mulk rather badly, which alerted him that there was some conspiracy afoot. Soon the relationship became tense and arguments between the two increased in frequency. Things reached a peak when Malik Shah remarked angrily that he would see the official vizier inkstand removed from Nizam al-Mulk's desk. When Nizam al-Mulk heard these remarks, he responded that if the inkstand was removed from his desk, the crown on Malik Shah's head would not remain for long. This reply made its way to the sultan's

ears, who immediately suspended Nizam al-Mulk and appointed Taj al-Mulk to the position.

This suspension is not mentioned by early historians. Most of the later historians, however, describe it in their books. It is thought that the suspension of Nizam al-Mulk was so closely followed by his death that many contemporaries remained unaware of it. Those who believe that his suspension did not take place argue that if Malik Shah was displeased with Nizam al-Mulk, he would not have commissioned him to write a book which then became the kingdom's constitution. They also question Malik Shah's journey to Baghdad in which he was accompanied by Nizam al-Mulk, which turned out to be Nizam al-Mulk's last journey before his death. If the suspension had taken place why would the king keep Nizam al-Mulk with him? Whatever the truth of the matter may be, it is certain that after years of stability in the kingdom, plots and conspiracies were once again taking hold.

Death

Fate plays a major role in one's life. When blessings are taken away, everything appears to go wrong for a person. Nizam al-Mulk's life suddenly took an ugly turn. On the one hand was the faction in court plotting against him, while on the other hand Hasan bin Sabah was making dangerous plans for him. Hasan bin Sabah is a blood-drenched character in history who kept kings and their people in terror of himself for a long time.

It is said that Nizam al-Mulk, Hasan bin Sabah and Omar Khayyam were fellow students in their youth, studying under Imam Mawfiq. Once the three friends got together and vowed that if any of them became powerful and influential, that person would use his influence to raise up the other two to share in his fortune. It was well-known at the time that most of Imam Mawfiq's students go on to become great and gain power and influence, and such a vow was eminently sensible.

The years passed and Nizam al-Mulk continued to rise in the ranks until he reached the position of vizier. One day, Omar Khayyyam appeared to remind him of their vow, and Nizam al-Mulk, keeping his promise, introduced him to Malik Shah. Omar Khayyam was a genius, an expert of both science and arts & literature. He was a mathematician, an astronomer and a poet. Malik Shah was very much impressed, and not only ordered a state-of-the-art observatory to be built for him but also awarded a regular grant so that Omar Khayyam could focus on his studies and research work instead of worrying about making ends meet. On Malik Shah's request, Omar Khayyam designed the Jalali calendar, one that is used even now in some parts of Iran, and is in many ways even more reliable than the Gregorian calendar, according to Gibbons.

Like Omar Khayyam, Hasan bin Sabah also came to Nizam al-Mulk for the fulfillment of the long-ago promise, according to some historians. Nizam al-Mulk obligingly introduced him to the sultan's court, where he quickly became a favorite of the sultan due to his sharp mind and quick wit. However, Hasan's nature was scheming and treacherous, and the sultan soon came to mistrust him, forcing him to flee from the court and disappear. He re-emerged in the Fatimid court of Al-Mustansir in Cairo, joining the Fatimid movement. Soon he adopted the beliefs of the Batiniyya movement, which is an offshoot of the Ismaili sect and was particularly prominent at the time of the Fatimid caliphate.

The Batiniyya movement was very active in the proliferation and spreading of their beliefs. When Hasan bin Sabah had the opportunity to come in close contact with the Fatimid caliph Al-Mustansir, the caliph saw at once how useful his sharp mind could be to the cause and recruited him immediately. Hasan bin Sabah can be described as an evil genius. Instead of straightforward preaching of his beliefs, he drafted a cunning plan. Choosing a mountainous fortress in Gilan as headquarters,

he quickly gathered around him a large number of devoted followers. From these he founded an order called the Order of the Assassins. They used tactics of asymmetric warfare, surgical strikes, psychological warfare and direct assassinations to intimidate and then eliminate any opponents that stood in the way of their cause. Hasan taught his devotees that if they succeeded in their assignments, then heaven would be waiting for them. He even gave them a taste for that heaven by showing them the beautiful gardens of the castle that indeed looked like an earthly paradise – instilling in the assassins such passion for their task that they did not hesitate to kill or die for the sake of the cause.

The fortress, known as the Alamut castle, soon become a center of terror for the whole region. Malik Shah was forced to send a message, warning that if their activities did not stop, the fortress would be sacked and razed to the ground. Such a message, however, did not have the desired effect and Hasan bin Sabah became determined to take his revenge for the humiliation he had suffered in Malik Shah's court years ago. He was displeased already with Nizam al-Mulk, specially since Nizam al-Mulk was known to be actively anti-Ismaili, and he also attributed the message to Nizam al-Mulk's influence. Thus he sent an acolyte from the Assassins to eliminate Nizam al-Mulk.

Nizam al-Mulk departed with Malik Shah on a trip to Baghdad in Ramadan of 495 AH. They stopped in the Persian city of Nahavand. After breaking his fast, Nizam al-Mulk offered his prayers and then mentioned the battle of Nahavand in which the companions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) had taken part. Walking around in search of the location where the companions had been martyred, he said, "How lucky are those who may experience the company of such great people!" He had just gone a few steps further when a man dressed as a Sufi dervish stopped him, holding out what appeared to be a petition for him to consider. Nizam al-Mulk stretched out his hand to accept the

petition when the man stabbed him with a dagger. The wound was deep, and Nizam al-Mulk passed away on the spot. When Malik Shah was informed, he rushed there at once, and sat weeping for a long time next to the body of his long-time mentor. Nizam al-Mulk died on the 10th of Ramadan, 495 AH at the age of 70.

Nizam al-Mulk's sudden death caused much grief across the Islamic world. Such a man who is at once both capable and sincerely devoted to the people is born to a nation very rarely. The man who left the world was a great thinker, a clever politician, an education expert, a loyal vizier with the king's best interests at heart, and a man who protected the people the way a father protects his children. With an air of grief and mourning, Nizam al-Mulk was buried in the graveyard of the district Kohran, located in Isfahan in modern day Iran.

Nizam al-Mulk's killer was soon caught and executed for murder. He was identified as a devotee of the Batiniyya sect at the time, but some people argued that he had instead been hired by Taj al-Mulk to eliminate Nizam al-Mulk. Yet others believed that it was Malik Shah who had arranged for the assassin in order to get rid of his too-powerful vizier. In his book "Tareekh al-Mashaheer" (The History of Famous People), Qazi Muhammad Suleiman Mansoorpuri comments on these theories, saying, "These are all suppositions. Allah heard his pious servant's prayer, saw his yearning, and allowed him to rest in peace in the company of the companions of the Prophet and the martyrs, giving him a blessing beyond that of a government position, i.e. to become a martyr in the same place where centuries before, the companions of the Prophet had been martyred."

Personality and Character

Nizam al-Mulk's life is a wonder to read. He was as particular about obeying Allah in his private life as he was in his capacity

as vizier. As soon as he would hear the call to prayer (*adhan*), he would pause whatever activity he was engaged in to go pray. If the *adhan* was not called on time, he himself would stand up to recite it. He tried to remain in a state of ablution (*wudhu*) all the time, and would recite extra prayers (*nawafil*) after every *wudhu*. He fasted not only during Ramadan but also on other days of the year as per the Prophet's practice. He always kept a copy of the Quran with himself, and gave great importance and respect to the *ahadith* of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). He used to say that he knew he wasn't worthy of being a narrator of *ahadith*, but he longed to be counted amongst them on the Day of Judgment. He preferred to spend his free time in the company of scholars and learned men, saying that he liked those scholars who pointed out his faults so that he may improve himself. He was always careful to give them his full respect and attention, and when visited by Imam al-Harmain or the famous theologian Abu al-Qasim, he often stood up and invited them to sit in his place as an expression of his respect for them.

Nizam al-Mulk liked to spend time with the common people, especially the poor, in order to prevent any arrogance or snobbery from entering his heart. Poor people routinely joined him for meals at his house and ate their fill. Abu al-Qasim describes an incident where he was invited to Nizam al-Mulk's house for a meal. Another vizier, 'Ameed al-Mulk, was seated next to Nizam al-Mulk, and next to him was a pauper whose right hand was cut off. When the meal was served and the pauper began to eat with his left hand, traces of disapproval and distaste appeared on 'Ameed al-Mulk's face. Nizam al-Mulk caught his expression and called the pauper over to sit next to him and enjoy the rest of his meal.

Nizam al-Mulk's generosity was talk of the town. When his travel route was known, rows of needy people would line the streets, and Nizam al-Mulk would walk past them, distributing bags of coins to all who asked. Some people, of course, used

this trait of his to take advantage of him. Several biographers have related an incident in this regard. They write that once Nizam al-Mulk's ride passed by an elderly man who told him his needs and received a bag of coins in return. Now the elderly man got greedy and decided to disguise himself as a disabled man, waiting again at a street Nizam al-Mulk would pass by. Nizam al-Mulk gave him another bag of coins. The man changed his disguise once more and this time asked for money so he could marry his young daughters. Nizam al-Mulk gave him the money once more. Again the man disguised himself, this time as a tired and wounded veteran soldier who had been defeated and lost all his money, and came once more to take advantage of Nizam al-Mulk's generosity. Nizam al-Mulk gave him another bag of money, smiling, and said, "Here, elderly man who is also disabled, and a father of young daughters, and a war veteran, here is another bag of coins for you!"

Apart from being generous, Nizam al-Mulk was also very tolerant and forgiving. He did not like to avenge small slights or mistakes, nor was he an unforgiving master to his servants. Once a sandstorm left a layer of dust on his bed that was neglected by his servants because they did not arrive on time to fulfill their duties. When the steward saw what had happened, he was furious and began to berate the servants for their incompetence. Nizam al-Mulk stepped in, saying, "It's alright, perhaps they went to take care of something else. We all have private matters that need our attention, and all of us occasionally neglect our duties. Allah has given us a higher rank than them, and the way to thank Him does not involve punishing them for the smallest mistakes."

Nizam al-Mulk believed in ignoring and disregarding personal insults, because it ultimately led to better results. A powerful and principled man must necessarily make many enemies. When those who were jealous of his influence or were angry at his lack of support for their agendas slandered and insulted him,

he usually chose not to reply or punish them. Once a poet that was under Nizam al-Mulk's sponsorship became angry with him and said several nasty verses impugning Nizam al-Mulk's honor. When Nizam al-Mulk heard, he did not punish him; instead, he increased the amount of the regular grant that the poet received. These characteristics of his personality were what endeared Nizam al-Mulk to the people and made him so trustworthy in their eyes.

All historians who describe the personality of Nizam al-Mulk admit that he had a major contribution in the greatness of the Seljuq empire. The famous British historian of Iran, Edward Browne, says, "He was the best organizer and a great thinker. He appreciated the value of good people, and aspired for the education and prosperity for the masses." In his book *A History of Persia* Hiti names Nizam al-Mulk as the most successful political thinker in the entire Islamic world. Ibn Khalikan writes, "For 20 years, Nizam al-Mulk was the de facto ruler of the empire, while the real sultan had nothing to do but sit on his throne or go hunting." It is no wonder that the sultan accorded great respect to Nizam al-Mulk.

When one looks at Nizam al-Mulk's great administration and clever but sincere politics, keeping in mind the Muslim rulers of today's time, a prayer for better leaders comes unbidden to the lips. May Allah grant us such rulers, viziers and advisers who consider their duties responsibly and as a trust. The collective decline that Muslim societies appear to be headed towards is steered predominantly by despicable rulers, corrupt viziers and their incompetent and incapable ministers. In his book *Siyasatnama*, Nizam al-Mulk quotes the Persian king Dara (Darius), saying, "The true reasons for the fall of an empire are the carelessness of the king and the dishonesty of the vizier."

Allah imposes incompetent and dishonourable leaders on nations whose moral character has been corrupted and whose

dealings are full of dishonesty. The Prophet's famous saying that "Your deeds are your rulers" (meaning that as you are, your leaders will be) endorses this phenomenon. Nizam al-Mulk knew this to be true based on the experience of a lifetime. Although he emphasizes the importance of honour and competence in the leadership, he also calls the people towards moral and religious elevation. If today's rulers are heedless of their responsibilities and morally corrupt, so are the people they govern. The only way to get rid of such leaders in favor of better ones is to reform individually and to work for the collective reform of the whole society.

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About the Author

Naima Sohaib is the author of *"Islami Tareekh ki Qabil-e-Fakhr Shakhsiat"*, a 480-page book in Urdu about fifteen eminent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author. It is the sequel of her first book *"Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shakhsiat"* which discusses twenty prominent Muslim personalities and has seen its fourth edition.

Naima has a Masters in Islamic Studies from University of Karachi and did her B.Sc. in Mathematics from Lahore College for Women. She has also authored several storybooks for children. She lives in Bahrain with her husband and four daughters.

About the Translator

Rida Sohaib, 20, is the English translator of the original Urdu work. An avid reader, she finds particular inspiration in reflecting upon the lives of Muslims born in difficult times who are forced to rise up to the challenge of leadership and find that they bear the mantle well. Her reverence for such heroes is what inspires her to take up the task of translation in the hopes that others will find their stories as rewarding and motivational as she does.

Rida has recently completed her Bachelors in Psychology from University College London, UK, and is pursuing her Masters from Cardiff University, UK.

SYED JAMALUDDIN AFGHANI

Naima Sohaib

Muslim Heroes series No. 15

Translated by Rida Sohaib

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Foreword

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

When reading the life events of the various inspiring personalities in the book *"Tareekh-e-Islam ki Qabil-e-Fakhr Shakhsiat"*, Jamaluddin Afghani stands out very much because of the sheer scope of his work. His message of pan-Islamic unity and the power of an Islamic, democratic revolution swept across the multitude of Muslim countries who were slipping deeper and deeper into the chains of European colonialism, under ineffective, incompetent, or self-interested leaders.

At such a time, a man was born in mid-nineteenth century, in the rather primitive country of Afghanistan. He traveled from Egypt to Turkey to India to Persia with the force and power of a hurricane. The people flocked to him wherever he went, and even political leaders could were drawn to him. His unapologetic, anti-imperialist opinions exiled him from various countries time and time again, but who can take away the dignity of a man whom God Himself has chosen for a task? He tried his utmost to wake up the Muslims from their slumber, and for this, the Muslim Ummah must forever be indebted to him.

Translating this booklet is a small effort to convey his message, his motivational personality, and his passion for Islamic unity to a more global audience.

I would like to thank Naima Sohaib for inspiring me with her reverence for Muslim heroes which is reflected in her writings, and Sohaib Umar for editing this translation. May Allah SWT accept our efforts.

Rida Sohaib

Syed Jamaluddin Afghani

An Architect of the Modern Islamic Intellectual Revival and an Anti-Imperialist Thinker

Who was Jamaluddin Afghani?

His name was Jamaluddin, and his titles include the Sage of the East, the Revolutionary, and the Great Mujahid.

He was a descendant of the famous Hadith scholar Syed Ali Tirmidhi, and further back of the Prophet's grandson Hussain (RA). His ancestors had settled in the city of Asadabad in Afghanistan in 783 CE. His father Syed Safdar was a learned scholar, quite influential and well-known in his social circle. There are not much details about Jamaluddin's mother Sakina Begum, but she is said to be a religious lady also related to Imam Hussain (RA).

Birth

Jamaluddin was born in the month of Sha'ban 1254 AH (1839 CE) in the city of Asadabad in Afghanistan. There is controversy surrounding his origins, with some historians claiming that he was actually born in Iran and taken to Iraq during his childhood, but others believe that these claims lack authenticity.

Childhood and Early Life

Jamaluddin was a young child when his father was summoned to Kabul by the Afghan government due to political reasons. Syed Safdar's influence in Asadabad was deemed dangerous by the government, and the summons was an attempt to keep him

away from the area. At the age of eight, Jamaluddin's education began in Kabul. His father was his first teacher. Jamaluddin possessed extraordinary intelligence, and progressed rapidly in his studies of history, religious law, logic, mathematics, medicine, languages and natural sciences. The names of his teachers cannot be determined with any certainty; while a couple of names have been suggested, they lack authenticity. Overall, it seems that his excellent education was largely due to his personal interest in specific fields of study, and by the age of eighteen, he had progressed quite far in those fields. It was around this time that his father received permission to return to their city, and Jamaluddin returned with him. A year after their return, in 1856 CE, his father passed away.

Stepping into the Practical World

Following the death of his father, Jamaluddin set out to gain worldly experience by traveling to India. Here he studied modern mathematics, but a lot of time was spent gauging the political situation. The Mughal Empire was at the time breathing its last, and the East India Company had control over all of India.

After India, Jamaluddin made his way to Makkah for Hajj. He spent a year in the region, observing the political, scholarly and spiritual situation of its inhabitants. From here he traveled to Syria and Palestine, and then to Iraq and Iran. What were his activities during these travels? Details are not available, though researchers suggest that he was carefully observing and noting the political, religious and social climate in different areas of the Islamic world in order to better plan his future efforts. He had an extremely active and dynamic personality from the beginning; even as a child. A burning desire to correct the wrongs he saw in the Islamic world was ingrained into him. It seemed predestined that he would focus his efforts on reforming the state of the Muslim Ummah.

Returning from his travels to Afghanistan, Jamaluddin began taking an active interest in politics. He became a counsellor to the king Dost Muhammad Khan, who appreciated him enough to appoint him as a tutor to his son Prince Muhammad Azam.

After the death of Dost Muhammad Khan in 1863 CE, his third son Sher Ali Khan was made king according to his will. Sher Ali Khan's older brothers were unwilling to give up their perceived right to the throne, but Jamaluddin interceded and managed to avert a possible bloodbath. Sher Ali Khan appointed him as his advisor. In this role Jamaluddin took many memorable steps during his reign. One such step was to publish a newspaper titled 'The Daytime Sun' (*Shams-ul-Nahar*) to raise awareness of local and global political issues in Afghanistan. The newspaper was highly popular. The increased political awareness and rising trend of reading newspapers and magazines in the country was attributed largely to his efforts.

Jamaluddin undertook many other initiatives, such as establishing schools based on modern principles, streamlining the postal system, suggesting improvements in the military, improving diplomatic relations with other countries, etc. His efforts were well on the way to turn Afghanistan into a prosperous, modern Islamic country when political conflict disrupted all his plans.

Muhammad Rafeeq, one of Sher Ali Khan's ministers, succeeded in his efforts to ignite the king's anger and suspicion against his brothers. Sher Ali Khan's fury could not bode well for his brothers, who left the area. So did Jamaluddin who fled to India. Hot in pursuit, Sher Ali Khan caught up with his brothers, killing one and capturing another. His own son was killed in the conflict. Lost in grief, Sher Ali Khan was thus unable to prevent yet another brother, Muhammad Azam (who was Jamaluddin's disciple), from deposing him and taking over the country. Muhammad Azam Khan immediately appointed

him as his advisor, but failed to heed his advice and was caught up in internal politics. Sher Ali Khan, with some help from the British, used this opportunity to take control of the country once again. Sick of these family battles, Jamaluddin left Afghanistan and traveled towards India. After the rebellion of 1857, the British had managed to take full control of the country. Jamaluddin found the climate uninviting, and instead headed towards Egypt.

Jamaluddin in Egypt – Sowing the Seeds of Freedom

When Jamaluddin first arrived in Cairo, he intended to stay only for forty days. Mostly to avoid idleness, he arranged to give Arabic grammar classes at the Al-Azhar University. Within a few days, his residence was crowded by university students who wanted to spend more time in his company. His lectures did not just discuss the Arabic language; he also spoke about politics, a subject he was an expert at. The call of Islamic freedom resonated deeply with the young Egyptian students. Egypt at the time had fallen victim to the greed of European colonialism like most Muslim countries. Egyptian politics was overshadowed by the influence of the British, who were a distinct target in Jamaluddin's speeches about the importance of freedom and the tricks and stratagems employed by Europeans to gradually enslave Egypt.

These speeches reached the ears of British spies who were alarmed at Jamaluddin's popularity. There was a growing likelihood that the youth of Egypt would be influenced enough by Jamaluddin's sincerity, passion and call for action that they would be mobilised to protect their freedom. Therefore, some agents of the British raised a storm of protest after a Christian man converted to Islam at the behest of Jamaluddin, and this protest was galvanised by liberal forces within the country. The ruler of Egypt, Khedive Ismail Pasha, used this opportunity as an excuse and ordered Jamaluddin to leave the country. Though

Jamaluddin departed, he had sowed the seeds of freedom into a land fertile for a movement for liberty. Soon Egypt was teeming with the call to independence.

Stay in Turkey

After withdrawing from Egypt, Jamaluddin first intended to go for Hajj, but then changed his mind and decided instead to travel to Constantinople. His stay in Egypt had been his debut into the Islamic world as a scholar as well as a political player. When he reached Turkey, the Prime Minister Ali Pasha got the news of his arrival, and he arranged a meeting out of curiosity. He was very much impressed by the passionate, sincere Jamaluddin dressed in flowing Afghan clothes, and appointed him to *Majlis ul Ma'arif* (a national council for promoting science and arts). He wanted Jamaluddin to introduce educational programmes that would benefit Turkey. Jamaluddin put forward several suggestions, but they were rejected by the local scholars because they felt that their own personal interests were being threatened by this 'upstart' scholar and his suggestions.

The Sheikh-ul-Islam (highest rank of an hierarchy of scholars used in the Ottoman Empire) of the time, Hasan Afandi, felt particularly threatened by the growing popularity of Jamaluddin amongst the general population and amongst influential people in authority. Helpless to counter it, he and his supporters contented themselves for the time being with watching for an opportunity to discredit Jamaluddin in front of the general public and the government.

Jamaluddin's popularity with the public, however, was rising rapidly. People flocked to him in thousands, listening to his speeches and lectures in Hagia Sophia and in Sultan Ahmed Mosque. His rhetoric had such logic and power that people named him 'the Enchanter of Hearts'. In Ramadan 1287 AH (1870 CE), the head of the Usmania University, Tahseen

Afandi, invited Jamaluddin to give a lecture on the benefits of industry and commerce. Initially, he declined the invitation, citing his lack of fluency in Turkish. Upon further insistence, he prepared a long lecture which he also showed to the minister of education and various other government officials. Their approval was given, and Jamaluddin consented to speak at the event.

On the day of the lecture, a vast number of people gathered to listen to him, including ministers, state officials, scholars and journalists. The Sheikh-ul-Islam was also present, hoping to catch an opportunity to cast Jamaluddin in a bad light. The lecture was very well expressed and eloquent. Jamaluddin compared the economy of a country to a human body, with each industry comparable to a particular body part, performing a unique and essential function to keep the body alive and well. After describing the analogy in detail, he stated that the body needs a soul, and the soul could either be prophethood (revelation) or it could be human wisdom. Prophethood comes from God and therefore what it tells us is free from error, while wisdom comes from humans and is therefore prone to errors and biases.

These ideas were neither new nor radical, nor did they oppose traditional scholarly views, but the Sheikh-ul-Islam added in lies and exaggeration, proclaiming that he had heard Jamaluddin claim that prophethood is a profession like any other. He encouraged his contemporaries and preachers to publicise this so-called blasphemy during their sermons and raise awareness among the public. As the campaign against Jamaluddin took off, he deduced immediately that hatred and jealousy had sparked this conspiracy by the Sheikh-ul-Islam. He went on the defensive, sparking a debate between the two. Newspapers and magazines published articles from both sides discussing various controversial issues. Some friends of Jamaluddin advised him not to prolong the debate and to choose silence, allowing the

whole matter to cool down. Jamaluddin refused to give in, however, and the situation continued to escalate until those in authority decided that it would be best for Jamaluddin to leave Turkey for a few months, and perhaps return once the affair was settled. Once again, Jamaluddin was forced to leave the country, and he headed towards Egypt with some of his companions.

In his book *Jamaluddin Afgani: the Herald of Unity in the Islamic World*, Qazi Abdul Ghaffar discusses the events that took place in Constantinople during Jamaluddin's stay. He writes:

"The fact of the matter is that Syed Jamaluddin's personality attributes became crystal clear during his stay in Constantinople. His courage and fearlessness, his competence and faith, and his strong feelings against the ultra-conservatives, all these were highlighted as vital elements of his personality. His friends and well wishers realised that worldly powers would not daunt the Syed. He also realised for the first time the extent of influence wielded by the conservative faction, and this first encounter with close-minded scholars was a milestone in his life."

Further, he writes that the Syed had become aware that the improvement of the religious situation in the Islamic world was impossible without working on the conservative faction of scholars, and the improvement of the political situation was impossible without resolving the despotism often prevalent in Muslim countries. This awareness and experience helped him greatly later on in life.

Back in Egypt

On the 22nd of March 1871 CE, Jamaluddin arrived in Egypt once more with the intention of a short stay. As the news reached the Egyptian public, they flocked to him in droves, hoping to meet him. Students too pursued a meeting with him –

they had not forgotten his last stay and they wanted to gain as much knowledge and wisdom from him as they could. Jamaluddin also encountered the prime minister of Egypt, Riyadh Pasha, who was so impressed that he invited him to stay in Egypt and awarded him an unconditional monthly allowance of 1,000 Qirsh.

The students of Al-Azhar University began to learn religious sciences, astronomy, sufism and jurisprudence from Jamaluddin. Students from all over Egypt visited his house hoping to benefit from his knowledge and wisdom. What appealed to them very much was his progressive way of thinking. Unlike the ultra-conservative scholars, Jamaluddin did not believe that it was wrong to seek modern knowledge that did not conflict with Islamic principles. This opinion was condemned by the conservatives and considered an innovation in religion, but Jamaluddin did not allow them to hinder him. The new generation agreed with his way of thinking and was convinced by his arguments. On one occasion, he said:

“What is astonishing and tragic is that our religious leaders have divided knowledge into two. One part they call Islamic knowledge, and the other they declare Western. As a result they stop people from making use of beneficial knowledge. They do not understand that knowledge is something pure and noble, and it cannot be confined to one group of people. How strange it is that Muslims do not mind reading the works of Aristotle or Plato, but declare it impermissible to read Galileo or Kepler. They believe that their actions serve Islam, but they are in reality opposing it. Truth is that which can be supported by reason or evidence. In short, Muslims cannot progress or prosper until our leaders and scholars reform themselves. Reflection on this matter has always shown that when our nations decline, the signs manifest in our scholars first, and then reach the rest of the people.”

Syed Jamaluddin Afghani attempted several times to explain that reflecting on scientific facts and using new discoveries and innovations in no way opposes the Quran; indeed, it is in agreement with it. The Quran does not explicitly tell us if the Earth is a round, moving object or if it is frozen in place, but it does command us to reflect on the creation of the heavens and the Earth. He did not like the approach of the traditional scholars that with each new scientific discovery, they start interpreting the Quran to adjust to the newfound knowledge. He believed that the explicit text of the Quran (Nus) is so clear cut that it did not need any interpretation or adjustment.

Principles of Composition, Trend of Journalism and Setting up of Welfare Organisations

Apart from encouraging his students to study sciences, Jamaluddin also took on the responsibility to teach them the principles of modern composition. Before his arrival in Egypt, writings often had unnecessarily long and flowery introductions, complex phrases and poetic wordings. Old styles of writing were popular and considered to be a reflection of accomplishment. Jamaluddin taught his students how to express their opinions and compose their essays and dissertations, and introduced them to a more natural and direct way of writing. The modern principles of composition that he taught them resulted in dozens of authors emerging later on who had formerly been his students, or had learned from his students. He taught his pupils the importance of focused writing geared towards a specific purpose, while remaining eloquent and articulate. This new style of writing resulted in a reformation in the academic and literary circles of Egypt.

His students encompass big names in the area of literature, including but not limited to Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, Muhammad Bik Molchi, Ibrahim Bik Molchi, Abdulkareem Salman, Saad Zaghloul Pasha and Ibrahim Afandi. Students

from other countries who also benefited from his teachings include Allama Adeeb Ishaq Shami, Allama Saleem Naqqaash Shami, Allama Saad Bustani and more. These students played an important role in promoting Jamaluddin's beliefs and opinions to a wider audience.

Jamaluddin also promoted journalism among his students. Reading the newspaper was not a common habit in Egypt, and the state of the journalism industry was such that the city of Alexandria published only two newspapers. These were in limited quantity and were mainly meant for the resident European population who wanted to keep abreast of global developments and were not much interested in local Egyptian politics. Jamaluddin believed that newspapers were very much necessary to raise political awareness among the Egyptian population. Therefore, he started a newspaper himself along with his companions, titled "Egypt". He later issued two more publications, called "The Mirror of the East" and "Guardian". These publications ran a daring commentary on the political situation in Egypt, with even the ruler and state officials not safe from its jibes. Occasionally satire would be used to highlight and mock the incompetence of state officials.

His accomplishments during his stay in Egypt were not limited to academia, literature and politics. He believed it equally necessary to effect a change of mind and heart; in short, to bring about a revolution. He began to form various types of organisations across the country. Most of them were welfare organisations that integrated the propagation of Islamic values with charity work. Of these, *Anjuman Hayat ul Watani* (The Life of the Homeland Organisation) was particularly popular. Jamaluddin's close companion, Muhammad Mahallati, describes the functions of the organisation in one of his writings. He states that amongst the organisation's goals was to facilitate an environment of praying, both compulsory and voluntary prayers, to encourage people to enjoin what is good

and forbid what is not, to call people towards Islam, to debate with the followers of other religions, especially Christianity, using reason and logic, and to help the poor and needy.

The members of the organisation were obligated to fill in a daily self assessment form and evaluate themselves on how many good or bad deeds they had committed that day. In one particular month, the organisation raised 10,000 Tomans, and their monthly performance appeared as follows:

"1,500 sick patients were looked after. 500 needy people had their needs taken care of. 2,500 drunkards and promiscuous individuals repented. 80 people working in British offices agreed to leave their jobs. 500 rich people agreed to sell some luxury items and give the money to charity. 75 poor people were given capital to start a business. 206 poor people were given financial assistance. 120 Christians accepted Islam. 24 conventions of debate with Christians were organised."

These details have been set out here to demonstrate the broadness of Jamaluddin's scope and goals for the Islamic world. He wanted to see Muslims succeed in all aspects of life – be it morals, knowledge, material well-being or spiritual connection. The renaissance of Islam and its domination in the world was his dream.

On the Political Horizon

Religious awakening, public welfare and reform attempts in a society can only go this far when the government of the country is in the opposition instead of championing the cause. Such was the case in Egypt, where the political climate was quite similar to other Muslim countries around the world. Qazi Abdul Ghaffar describes the situation in these words:

"When the Sheikh (i.e. Syed Jamaluddin Afghani) entered Egypt for the second time, Khedive Ismail was ruling the

country. The Sultan of the Ottoman Empire was the leader in name only. The English and the French were advancing rapidly. The Suez Canal had been inaugurated, and acted as a heavy chain of European politics around the neck of the Egyptians. The incompetence and spendthriftness of Khedive Ismail had taken a heavy toll on the economy and the general public. Egypt was under a public debt of around 95 million pounds, and Khedive's spending was increasing this loan annually by an average of 700,000 pounds. Farmers were suffering from the impact of drought. The capitalists and financiers of Europe were focused on receiving their loans and investment with interest and despite their harsh demands of repayments Khedive would not be bothered to reduce his spending. The last eight years of this destructive period were witnessed personally by Syed Jamaluddin. Around this time, Europe formed a commission to enable European creditors to receive back the loans they had extended, and Britain and France took charge of Egypt's financial matters. The real reason behind this commission, of course, was to seize control of Egypt's revenues. Khedive Ismail sold shares of the Suez Canal to fund his spending; his only goal was to ensure that he has enough money for himself. This led to almost a complete cessation of its control to European powers. The iron chain with which Europe wanted to enslave not just Egypt but the entire East Asia was thus solidified further. Undoubtedly it can be said that Khedive Ismail's life proved to be a curse for himself and others, and for his country and other countries. The years between 1857 and 1880 were some of the worst in Egyptian history, and they coincided with Syed Jamaluddin's efforts in the country. In this era of tribulations, he taught the oppressed people of Egypt a lesson in dignity and fighting for their rights. The darkness shadowing the Islamic world became to Syed Jamaluddin a call for action."

Syed Jamaluddin incited the Egyptian people against Khedive Ismail's incompetence and corruption through his speeches and

writings. Soon discontent and anger swept the nation. European powers, sensing his unpopularity, convinced the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire to dismiss him, and Tawfiq Pasha was appointed instead. Jamaluddin hoped that this change would be for the better, since Tawfiq Pasha had once been a student of his, but Pasha had changed since then. Shareef Pasha, who belonged to Jamaluddin's party and had been appointed as prime minister of Egypt, was deposed within a month. Tawfiq Pasha was convinced by his advisors that Jamaluddin would continue to pose a threat to him by demanding democratic reforms as long as he remained in Egypt. He was therefore ordered to leave the country.

At 2.00 am in the morning soldiers knocked at Jamaluddin's door and surrounded him as soon as he came out. He was taken to the Suez under strict observation, with nothing but the clothes he was wearing. Here the Iranian ambassador managed to arrange a visit with him. He offered Jamaluddin three thousand pounds, saying that these might help him if he needed to purchase any essentials. Jamaluddin regarded the money with contempt, and commented, "Keep the money; you need it more than I do. The lion creates sustenance for himself wherever he goes."

Jamaluddin said farewell to Egypt for the last time, but he had lit the fire of freedom within the general public. Qazi Abdul Ghaffar pays tribute to him in these words:

"The first leader of Egyptian nationalists was not Egyptian. He was not born in Egypt, nor did he grow up there, and nor was he familiar with the ancient customs and traditions of Egypt. He belonged to the Afghan nation, a militant, almost savage people, but he traveled far and raised the banner of Islamic freedom and democracy high, until he gained so much influence in the lives of the common Egyptians that he became the greatest leader of the nation."

In reality, the basis of Syed Jamaluddin's struggle was a principle superior to race or nation. He believed that the success and prosperity of any Islamic country was the success of Islam as a whole. He pictured the Islamic world as a body, and each country as a principle organ. Any organ that gains in strength is the cause of increased strength of the whole body.

In India

At the close of the year 1879 CE, Jamaluddin Afghani left the Suez to go to Mumbai, where he stayed for a few days before proceeding to Hyderabad. Here he stayed with a liberal-minded influential person, Rasool Yar Jung. The climate in Hyderabad was not receptive to Jamaluddin's political ambitions. The failed war of independence in 1857 CE had induced an overpowering sense of despair and loss within the Muslims. Even the religious leaders were in a state of passive hopelessness, and Jamaluddin himself was under strict monitoring by the British regime. Undaunted, Jamaluddin expressed an interest in the academic, cultural and intellectual activities of Hyderabad. Soon he had become renowned amongst the scholars, and intellectual discussions and debates began to take place at his place of residence. During this period Jamaluddin also discovered Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's naturalist school of thought. On the insistence of his friends he wrote a paper on this in which he explained that in every period of history, materialism tries to achieve its ambitions through misguiding beliefs. Those propagating such beliefs proclaim themselves to be sincere reformers and leaders of the people. However, nations that fall prey to such beliefs are inevitably carried towards decline and destruction. He further expanded upon the importance of remaining firm on the fundamental principles of religion since that is vital for achieving success in this world and the hereafter. This article was published in the magazine *Mu'allim* (Teacher) owned by Maulvi Muhib Hussain. The same magazine printed six other articles by

Jamaluddin, which are preserved as part of his legacy.

Like everywhere he went, the students of Hyderabad took special note of his presence. He was surrounded by a crowd of students almost all the time who wished to learn from him whatever he would agree to teach. This popularity and influence once again posed a problem for higher powers. Jamaluddin's friend Blunt, who reached India after Jamaluddin, writes about his presence in Hyderabad: "The students here greatly revere Jamaluddin. They are young and deeply passionate. They all hate Britain, and they are broad-minded about religion. They share Jamaluddin's opinions, and admire him almost to the point of idealisation."

Hatred of the British establishment along with such an influence amongst the youth was a recipe for trouble, so the prime minister of Hyderabad Salar Jung decided to meet with Jamaluddin. Though very much impressed with the scope and depth of his knowledge, Salar Jung was still conscious of the potential threat Jamaluddin posed to the British regime. He offered to employ him in an official capacity to neutralise this risk, but Jamaluddin declined, saying that he was too hot-headed to be of much use in the position of a state employee. Later, however, he revealed that the main reason for declining the offer was that jealousy was rampant in Hyderabad, and he knew it would make him enemies who would incite the British authorities against him, which could lead to another exile.

During his stay, Jamaluddin observed that most Indian Muslims either refused to learn modern sciences due to their disapproval of all things Western, or they learnt English and became disconnected from their roots and conformed to Western norms and traditions. He proposed the solution to this problem in an article where he discussed the importance of a national language for the success of a nation. He expressed surprise that the leaders in India did not appear to grasp the necessity of the

national language being the medium for education. He wrote:

“Is it not strange that modern sciences and art now dominate the world, but not one of these excellent materials has been translated into the language of India? Have the people of India become blind to the fact that if beneficial knowledge does not become part of their collective national life in their own national language then their nationhood will not achieve sustainability?”

Further in this article he asks the intellectuals of India that since the British, who are highly advanced in modern sciences, have been reigning for so long, why has the opportunity not been availed to learn from them? What could be the reason for not translating the modern sciences into Urdu and other local languages in order to benefit the nation? He wrote:

“How is it possible for the nation to benefit from these sciences if they are not first translated into the national language? How is it possible for these sciences to become widespread and long-lasting when they exist only in foreign languages? Why should one be proud of the fact that their library contains thousands of books in a foreign language, but none that could benefit their country written in a local language? How can a wise person consider another nation’s pride as his own, and how can he take pride in the accomplishments of other nations instead of his own?”

Jamaluddin advised the prime minister Salar Jung to translate books written in English into Urdu. Starting from primary school and making the way up to the higher classes, the whole system should undergo a gradual change in the medium of education. For this purpose, he encouraged his friends in literary circles to establish academies with the goal of translating English books. He personally supervised some translations. He also proposed that an Urdu university should be established and wrote articles in favour of this idea. While it was not

implemented immediately, both Nawab Salar Jung and Nizam Hyderabad praised it very much. Jamaluddin continued to pursue this even after leaving India. Though his hopes did not come to fruition at the time, the dream came true forty years later when Usmania University was established in Hyderabad. It was the first university in the world which taught all the faculties in Urdu language.

On the Egyptian front, Airabi Pasha, who was leading the freedom movement, claimed during a protest, "I could have India rebel against the British." This challenge alarmed the British who were already feeling that matters were spinning out of their control in Egypt. Although Jamaluddin was not linked directly to the movement of Airabi Pasha, he was deemed a potential threat and was thus put on house arrest in Calcutta. After the furore in Egypt died down, he was allowed once more to leave Calcutta.

Jamaluddin in the Western World

Jamaluddin Afghani belonged to a nation that no superpower in the world has been able to enslave. This freedom did mean, however, that the Afghans consistently engaged in in-fighting and civil wars, while the rest of the Islamic world was almost completely subjugated by colonial powers. In spring 1883 CE, Jamaluddin travelled to America from Calcutta. After a short stay, he proceeded to London and then to Paris.

Paris, at the time, was a hub for refugees from the East. From here, Jamaluddin wanted to conduct a dialogue with both the Eastern and the Western worlds. He wanted access to the Western public and to fair-minded authority figures to inform them of the perspective of the Islamic world on contemporary politics. He also wanted to give useful advice to the various Muslim leaders from all over the world who had been forced to leave their countries due to increasing dangers. For this purpose, he turned once more to journalism. His famous student Shaikh

Muhammad Abduh from Egypt as well as Mirza Baqar Irani reached Paris in order to help him with his ambitions. In March 1884 CE, the first issue of the Arabic newspaper "The Indissoluble Link" (*al-Urwat ul-Wuthqa*) was published. The aim of this newspaper to raise awareness among the Eastern nations, especially Muslims, about the dangerous aspirations of the West. The tone of the newspaper was so harsh and unyielding that it alerted the Western powers at once. For example, in the very first issue, it mentioned:

"These nations built on greed and capitalism present themselves as friends wherever they go. They speak in soft, caring tones. Authoritative inflections appear gradually. In the beginning, they are there ostensibly to protect the throne in some countries, to prevent foreign powers from taking over, to strengthen the country, to suppress rebellions, etc. Such excuses allow them to infiltrate the power structure, and then they gain complete control."

The first few issues of "The Indissoluble Link" sparked much restlessness in the West. The articles were translated into several languages. Extracts were quoted in Western newspapers. They also inspired a passionate response in the emotions of Muslims living in India, in Egypt, and even in France. Within a few months of its publication, various regimes began imposing restrictions on the newspaper. Its production and import was first banned in Egypt, then it was restricted from import in India. The British Empire forbade the newspaper everywhere within its boundaries. Jamaluddin and his student Shaikh Muhammad Abduh were busy trying to continue the publication in the small room where they were staying. After the restrictions had been imposed, the newspaper was sealed into envelopes before distribution to avoid detection from authorities. After the eighteenth issue was released, publication had to be stopped due to financial difficulties and extensive restrictions. Within a mere six months, the newspaper had caused an earthquake in Western

corridors of power. The accomplishment of the newspaper was that it had shown the West its real face, while it also detailed out for the Muslims the real reasons for their decline without mincing the words.

As a highly talented man, Jamaluddin often learnt the language of whichever country he was staying in, usually within a few weeks. During his stay in France, he learnt French and quickly became familiar with the French newspapers and the type of articles that were published in them. His popularity and fame meant that his name was not unknown even in the West. His articles soon started appearing in Western newspapers. Around that time in March 1883 CE, the famous philosopher Ernest Renan gave a lecture in Sorbonne University in Paris titled "Islamism and Science". In this lecture he tried to prove that Islam and science could not prosper simultaneously, and that Muslims progressed academically only when they became religiously weak. In response to this lecture, Jamaluddin published two articles in major journals which proved that it was not Islam but Christianity which historically hindered scientific progress.

Renan was stunned and impressed by the scholarly caliber of these articles. In his response to Jamaliddin's articles, he called him the Afghan Sheikh of extraordinary intelligence. Later when he met him, he described the meeting as surreal and inspiring wonder. He felt that Avicenna (Ibn Sina) or Averroes (Ibn Rushd) had come to life and were sitting with him. In reply to Jamaluddin's arguments, Renan stated that he had not meant the teachings of Islam but the Islam followed by prejudiced and highly conservative Muslims in Islamic countries. He also could not resist adding that all divine religions are obliged to oppose factual sciences, and in this Christianity is not superior to Islam. Christian societies, however, have managed to free themselves from their religion's limitations. Muslim societies have been unable to do the same, but it is hoped that liberal-minded

Muslims will one day achieve such freedom.

Had this Western philosopher examined Islam in greater depths, he could never have made such a claim. He had admitted earlier that in the first half of Islamic history, the sciences grew exponentially compared to the second half. Does this fact itself not prove Islam's compatibility with science and knowledge? Earlier Muslims were, after all, better acquainted with the proper spirit of Islam. Like other Western philosophers, Renan was also a proponent of the superiority of science and reason over spirituality and divinity. In spite of this, however, Renan describes a spiritual experience he once had when he visited Morocco. He says that he saw a prayer being offered in congregation in a mosque in Morocco, and the sight moved him so deeply that he felt that if he ever embraced a religion, it would be Islam. He provides no factual reasons for this spiritual experience.

The debate between the two great philosophers from the East and the West reached no definitive conclusion, but Jamaluddin fulfilled the obligation of communicating Islam's message to the Western world, and this effort made him prominent in the eyes of the Western intellectuals.

Meanwhile in Sudan, Muhammad Ahmad, also known as the Sudani Mahdi, laid siege to Khartoum (capital of Sudan) with his forces. The British general Gordon was completely cut off as Mahdi's forces surrounded the city. The British government attempted to convince Jamaluddin to go to Khartoum and act as mediator between Mahdi's forces and Gordon's. However, Gordon was killed soon after, and Jamaluddin also remained firm on his opinion that mediation was worthless unless the British agreed to withdraw their armed forces from Sudan and return freedom to Egypt.

On another occasion, the British attempted to recruit Jamaluddin to help unify the Islamic countries to form a bloc in

order to put pressure on Russia. Jamaluddin thought it appropriate to take advantage of the conflict between Russia and Britain to further Islamic interests, and he agreed. Sir Drummond-Wolff was chosen by the British to accompany Jamaluddin to Turkey and address various relevant matters with the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. However, a couple of days before they were to leave for Turkey, Drummond-Wolff chose to head off alone without letting Jamaluddin know. This ill-treatment caused much disgruntlement in the heart of Jamaluddin against British politics.

Jamaluddin in Tsar's Russia

Disappointed by the British, Jamaluddin wondered if gaining the support of Russia instead would be beneficial for the Muslims. The Tsardom of Russia was an oppressive place for the 14 million Muslims living there. They were second class citizens and subject to many restrictions, including publication of the Quran. This naturally led to resentment and anger within the Muslim community, and secret opposition groups in Russia constituted a fair number of Muslims.

After reaching Russia Jamaluddin met with government officials and persuaded them to convince the Tsar to restore the basic rights of Muslims. Allah blessed his efforts to the extent that the Tsar gave permission to publish the Quran and other Islamic literature. However, Jamaluddin was unable to negotiate an alliance between Russia and Islamic countries that would protect them from European colonialism. Still, within the one-year duration of his stay, he had succeeded in fulfilling a long-desired wish of Russian Muslims, who were greatly indebted to him.

Jamaluddin Afghani was not one to rest or stand passively. If he did not succeed in one mission, he would divert his attention to another one. After leaving Russia, he went to Paris once more. There he met the Iranian ambassador Prince Malkam, whom he

discovered to be a like-minded individual. Prince Malkam made a special request for a proposal of reforms for the Shah of Iran Nasiruddin Qajar. Jamaluddin drafted a proposal with diligence and sincerity, and visited Iran personally, but his democratic disposition made no allowances for dictatorships, and the proposed reforms placed more limitations on the Shah's power than was acceptable to him, so the matter came to nothing.

Jamaluddin travelled to Russia once more. He very much wanted to gain Russian support for Muslim countries against Europe. This time, he met with his friend and famous journalist Katkov who had a great deal of influence among the political elite of Russia. Jamaluddin wanted to gain his assistance with this cause, but Katkov died suddenly, bringing this scheme to nothing. During his stay in Russia he also met with the Tsar, who was so impressed with Jamaluddin's knowledge of and insight into global affairs that he invited him to stay in Russia as the leader of all Russian Muslims. Jamaluddin declined, and proceeded to Germany instead. Then he went to Paris for an exhibit, where he met the Shah of Iran who insisted on Jamaluddin accompanying him to Iran. Jamaluddin declined this offer too at first, but then accepted out of diplomacy. From Paris, Jamaluddin had to travel to Russia first, reasons for which will be discussed later. He then arrived in Iran.

A Breath of Fresh Air for Persia: Jamaluddin's Visit to Iran

Qazi Abdul Ghaffar discusses the situation in Iran when Jamaluddin first arrived. He writes:

"This was a dark period of time in the history of Iran. The nation of Iran was on the brink of destruction. Nasiruddin's government was imposed on Iran almost as a punishment. Nasiruddin was captivated by the base, materialistic attractions of life so prevalent in Europe. Huge amounts of money were

being wasted in Europe's cafes and markets. In 1889 CE, Nasiruddin arrived in Europe for the third time for the sake of tourism. He had already been on a leisurely trip of Europe twice, once in 1873 and then in 1878. These trips were highly expensive and almost bankrupted the nation, after which it was easy for European powers to begin interfering in the internal affairs of Iran like they had done in Egypt. Like Khedive Ismail, Nasiruddin was also willing to sell his national treasures to the highest bidder. European creditors have always taken pleasure in crushing such foolish, pleasure-seeking kings of the East under their debt, and Nasiruddin was no exception. Under the guise of friendship, they nudged Nasiruddin towards effective strategies to suck the maximum amount of money from the people. After the Shah's return from Europe in October 1889, he opened the door even wider for further concessions to Britain and Russia. The letters that Syed Jamaluddin Afghani later wrote to jurists about Iran contain a lot of the sheer robbery going on in Iran at that moment in time. An exclusive contract with many considerations to build a road from Ahvaz to Tehran was awarded to a British company. The mining of minerals was practically handed to European contractors. The British were given permission to establish a national bank. A Russian prince was given a monopoly of the railway network. A European company was allowed to establish a lottery, which wasted huge amounts of Iran's money."

It was in these conditions that Jamaluddin was to travel to Iran. When Iran's prime minister Mirza Asghar Khan heard about Jamaluddin's impending arrival, he became rather wary of his potential closeness to the Shah. A supporter of Britain, he was also afraid that Jamaluddin's enthusiastic backing of improvement in Russia-Muslim relations coupled with the Shah's recent leaning in favour of Russia could harm British interests in the country. To delay Jamaluddin's arrival in Iran, therefore, the prime minister sent him a message requesting that he go to Russia to improve their outlook on a potential alliance

with Iran. Jamaluddin accepted this request in good faith. He travelled once more to Russia where he met with dozens of important people and tried to improve the public's opinion of Iran.

When he felt that he had succeeded in his mission, he proceeded to Tehran where he sent an alert of his arrival to both the Shah and the prime minister. Apart from a welcome message, Jamaluddin received no other communications. He stayed for some months with Haji Muhammad Hasan, attempting frequently to meet with the prime minister without success. On the other end, the Russians were awaiting a result of the dialogue they had engaged in with Jamaluddin. When some time had passed and the Russians became more insistent, Jamaluddin told them frankly, "I have not been able to meet with the prime minister, and the reason is unknown." The Russians therefore gave up on this unfruitful endeavour and decided to engage through ambassadorial channels.

Since sitting idle was not his style, Jamaluddin once more engaged in lectures. Haji Muhammad Hasan's residence attracted scholars, students and the general public as the classes took off. Watching his popularity rise, the prime minister convinced the Shah that Jamaluddin was a threat to his reign, and that Iran's climate was not favourable for reforms at the moment. The Shah's suspicion against Jamaluddin rose. At the same time, Jamaluddin's standing in Russia had also fallen when his promised negotiations for better relations did not take place. When he began openly criticising the prime minister's conduct, he received an order to leave Tehran.

Jamaluddin asked the permission to return to Europe which was not granted, so he took refuge in a shrine called Abdul Azeem Shrine near Tehran. This shrine was famous for providing sanctuary to whoever entered it, and was therefore known as a safe refuge. From here, Jamaluddin wrote a letter to the Shah. In

it, he detailed the dismissive behaviour of the prime minister ever since Jamaluddin's arrival in Iran, and asked for the reason. He inquired why he had been invited to Iran if this was the treatment he was to expect. After clearing his position he once again reassured the Shah of his sincerity and goodwill and mentioned that he was waiting in the Abdul Azeem Shrine for any order by the Shah.

He never received a reply to his letter, but in the meantime, he once again began to attract large numbers of people wanting to take advantage of his presence in Iran. His lectures were so moving and resonating that thousands of his supporters carried a revolutionary determination in their hearts after listening to him in the sanctuary.

Exiled Once More

Seven months after his entrance into the sanctuary, in 1890 CE, Jamaluddin fell ill. During this illness, five hundred soldiers appeared one day on horseback to arrest him on the Shah's orders. Nothing stopped the Shah, neither the sanctity of the shrine, nor the unpopularity of this order amongst the people, and nor Jamaluddin's ill health. He was summarily exiled from Iran. He describes his arrest himself:

"In severe ill health I was tied to a donkey with chains and ropes by merciless soldiers. My health worsened because of this treatment. The weather was extremely cold, and a chilly wind was blowing, which hit the body such that it felt like arrows were piercing me all over. In this situation, the chains were wounding my body even further. The soldiers did not show any mercy either. My protests and my illness had no effect on them. Thus the long journey from Iran to Basra (a city in Iraq) was completed."

After reaching Basra, Jamaluddin wrote a long letter to the Iranian Grand Ayatollah Mirza Hasan Shirazi. In the letter, he

stated that even if the personal shortcomings of the Shah were overlooked, the damage he was causing the economy would soon manifest openly, and it would be the general public that would be forced to suffer. In particular, he drew attention to the handover to the British of the right to cultivate tobacco in the country, and addressed the Ayatollah in these words:

"O guardian of Islam! Will you not rise to help this nation and unite them, and purge this country of its filth using the purity of Shari'ah? This Islamic country will without doubt be soon under the rule of foreigners, who will reign as they wish. If you let go of this opportunity, and such a takeover happens during your lifetime, then O Imam, your name will not be remembered in good words in the pages of history."

The scholars and religious leaders were already unhappy and worried about the political situation of the country. Iran's tobacco industry had been fully sold to the British contractors, and the profit had only benefited the Shah and his ministers. Jamaluddin's letter acted as a spark of fire to a pile of gunpowder. The next day a religious verdict (Fatwa) was issued by Mirza Shirazi, declaring the use of tobacco in any form to be tantamount to war against the Imam. This verdict took effect so rapidly and comprehensively that when the Shah asked for his usual hookah the next day, he was told that there was no tobacco in the palace. When he inquired about the reason in surprise, he was told that all the tobacco in the palace had been destroyed in line with the verdict by the Grand Ayatollah. Furious, the Shah demanded why his permission had not been sought beforehand. His servants replied that this was a religious matter so his permission was not thought to be necessary. After intense pressure, Shah Nasiruddin was forced to cancel the tobacco contract with the British company, after which the verdict against tobacco was repealed by Mirza Shirazi. This was a slap in the face of Nasiruddin, who had tried to humiliate Syed Jamaluddin, but in the end was humiliated himself.

Jamaluddin was still involved in Iranian politics after he had left Basra and arrived in London. He wrote about the corruptions of the Qajar regime in the magazine "Zia-ul-Khafiqeen" where he encouraged the Iranians to overthrow Nasiruddin in favour of a better leader. He felt that the climate in Iran was favourable for a revolution. He also held several meetings with the former Iranian ambassador and his friend Prince Malkam. He was in agreement with Jamaluddin's views, and therefore a target of the Shah's wrath. Jamaluddin was thus absorbed in Iranian politics when the Turkish ambassador conveyed an invitation from the Sultan to come to Constantinople.

The Last Flight of the Eagle…to Constantinople

Jamaluddin had by now become so fed up with kings and their hypocritical practices that he refused the invitation to Constantinople. The ambassador, however, was persistent, forcing Jamaluddin to seriously consider the matter and confer with Prince Malkam. In the end, he concluded that an attempt should be made in Turkey as well, in case it could have a positive outcome for Muslims. Therefore, in 1892 CE, Jamaluddin left London and arrived in Turkey. Sultan Abdul Hamid met him in Constantinople with a warm welcome and treated him as a royal guest. He was given a beautiful house to stay in and a monthly honorarium was also fixed. The Sultan appeared to be very much in awe of Jamaluddin, and treated him with great respect. He would meet with Jamaluddin for hours where they discussed the topic of unity in the Islamic world. Whenever Jamaluddin arrived for a meeting, the Sultan would greet him by kissing his cheek. Jamaluddin also offered the Friday prayers regularly with the Sultan. But after a short while, events took a turn. To understand why this happened, it is essential to understand Turkey's political climate at that time.

At its peak, the Ottoman Empire had spanned an area of around four million square miles and three continents, constituting a

population of tens of millions. For centuries, the Islamic world had accepted its strength and position as leader. When its decline started in the seventeenth century, large regions began slipping out of the control of the Ottomans, and all attempts to stop or reverse this process ended in failure. The succeeding emperors were unable to handle the empire they inherited, and its division continued unabated. When the situation is viewed in a historical perspective, it is astonishing to see how the foolishness of rulers and the apathy of the general public can lead to the destruction of empires built on centuries of hard work and dedication.

The Ottoman Empire's decline originates from 1664 CE, when they were defeated in a battle by Austria. In 1682 CE, they were badly defeated once more in Vienna, forcing them to adopt a defensive stance. Near the end of the seventeenth century, an Austrian prince won a victory over the Ottomans again during the Battle of Zenta, leading to the Treaty of Karlowitz. By the terms of this treaty, the Ottomans were forced to cede many of their territories to Europeans. Ukraine was ceded to Poland and Morea to Venice. Other areas were ceded to Russia and yet others to Austria. In 1736 CE, Russia seized Ochakov and Azov. European powers and Russia constantly aided and funded rebellions within the Ottoman Empire in an effort to weaken it. The British, for example, aided and conspired against the Ottomans in Egypt, which resulted in local leaders declaring their own kingdom and autonomy from the Ottomans. Sinister propaganda against the Ottomans was insidiously spread throughout the Muslim regions under Ottoman rule. The concept of nationalism began to take hold and the local populace gradually turned against the Ottomans and the institution of caliphate. Within half a century, the Ottoman Empire had become so weak that many Muslim-majority areas rebelled, and most non-Muslim areas were forcibly annexed by Russia and other European forces.

In 1830 CE, France took control of Algeria. In 1832 CE, constant interference and pressure from the British and the Russians forced the Ottomans to grant independence to Greece. In 1853 CE, Russia occupied Crimea, and encouraged rebellions in Albania and Bosnia. Serbia declared its independence in 1876 CE. In 1878 CE, Russia formally declared war on the Ottomans, who faced severe defeat in Anatolia and in the European part of Turkey. Romania and Slovia gained freedom, while parts of Turkey were granted to Bulgaria. The provinces of Kars, Ardahan and Bayazid (now Doğubayazıt) were relinquished to Russia, and Cyprus was handed over to Britain. A rebellion took place in Eastern Rumelia, which was then incorporated into Bulgaria.

The wounded Ottoman Empire was struggling to survive, having been termed ‘the sick man of Europe’ by the same powers that had reduced it to such a state. These various powers were callously distributing various areas of the empire amongst each other, while the empire itself was in dire straits. The Sultan decided to strengthen the empire internally to be better able to face external pressures, and began a series of reforms which helped stabilise the situation to an extent. Russia, afraid that internal stability would reduce the chances of interference, escalated rebellions going on within the empire to such a degree that the Sultan could no longer focus on the reforms.

A faction had grown within the Turks which preferred a democratic system over the Islamic caliphate that had lasted for centuries. Midhat Pasha was a leading statesman belonging to this faction. He gathered support from scholars and ministers, and succeeded in deposing the Sultan. Murad V ascended to the throne, but was deposed after three months on grounds of being mentally ill. He was succeeded by Abdul Hamid II.

Abdul Hamid was a monarchist. He found it unacceptable to concede power to others, even if such priorities led to the

downfall of his empire. To consolidate his control, he dissolved the parliament and then placed Midhat Pasha under house arrest (and later killed). Increasing restrictions on reformists led the Sultan to believe that he had the situation under control. On the foreign front, he had proved to be as incompetent as his predecessors. As land continued to slip out of his control, he was well aware that sooner or later, he would have to face a massive rebellion. He therefore decided to gain the moral support of the rest of the Islamic world in order to strengthen his own domestic position. It appeared to him that Jamaluddin Afghani would be a good pawn for the completion of such a task. He was popular in all the Islamic countries. Shiites and Sunnis alike admired his character, his passion and his supreme knowledge and insight. Thus he invited Jamaluddin to come to Constantinople.

The Last Attempt

Jamaluddin did not hold a particularly favourable view of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, nor did he fully believe his promises and assurances. Why, then, did he agree to stay with him in Turkey? Qazi Abdul Ghaffar explains:

"Just like the Sultan wanted to use Syed Jamaluddin Afghani to further his own self-interests, Syed wanted to use the Sultan to promote unity among Muslims. Syed saw Islamic unity as essential in improving the conditions of Muslims. The Sultan's encouragement caused a potential scheme for Islamic unity to take root in the Syed's mind and from that, a plan to call representatives of Islamic countries to attend a conference began to blossom."

Jamaluddin dictated five hundred letters to various people in Arabic, Hindi, Persian and Turkish. Most replies were encouraging. Jamaluddin informed the Sultan of the positive response, who was delighted. This period was one of relative tranquility for Jamaluddin, and he was the Sultan's favourite.

The situation changed when Sultan Abdul Hamid arrested some of Jamaluddin's companions at the request of Shah Nasiruddin, and extradited them to Iran. Outraged at this treatment of his friends, Jamaluddin protested. The Sultan appeared to regret his decision and wrote to Iran's Shah instructing him to return the prisoners, but they had already been executed. This event considerably lowered whatever trust Jamaluddin had in the Sultan. At the same time, a couple of other occurrences also sowed suspicion against Jamaluddin in the Sultan's heart.

Sultan Abdul Hamid knew that Jamaluddin leaned towards democracy and strongly disliked dictatorships and monarchies. On the other hand, the Sultan preferred to centralise power. As an example, the recruitment for his secret police continued to increase steadily in order to spy on people. He was afraid that Jamaluddin would demonstrate his dislike in public, which could be disastrous for the Sultan's public image. To avoid this and to please Jamaluddin, he sent a messenger to him carrying the highest possible award in Turkey. When the messenger arrived, Jamaluddin was lecturing his students. He looked at the medal carelessly and hung it around the neck of a cat sitting nearby. Dumbstruck, the messenger cried, "Do you not know that the Sultan himself has sent you this award?" Jamaluddin replied, "I am well aware, but the necks who wear such medals usually belong to the dishonest." The messenger returned and narrated the conversation to the Sultan who, although furious, could do nothing but seethe in silence.

Like everywhere, Jamaluddin's popularity in Turkey and his apparent closeness to the Sultan made him no few enemies among courtiers. A leading opposer was Abul Huda, who flattered the Sultan and told him stories of Jamaluddin's indifference to him. Struck by his stories, the Sultan asked Jamaluddin to befriend Abul Huda. Jamaluddin, who had formed an opinion of the man as being greedy and selfish, declined the request. When Abul Huda heard this, he was

furious. He conspired against Jamaluddin, assuring the Sultan that Jamaluddin had met secretly with the Khedive of Egypt when he had recently visited Turkey, and that he wanted the Khedive to be the caliph of Muslims instead of the Sultan. This alarmed the Sultan, who ordered a closer monitoring of Jamaluddin.

After a while, the Sultan became convinced that his suspicions were groundless, but Jamaluddin had lost hope in the Sultan's goodness. He cared about his own power and his throne above all other considerations, and he was furthering his own self-interests under the guise of strengthening the caliphate. In Jamaluddin, however, he had met a man who refused to be purchased at any price. He said what he thought was right, and no amount of the Sultan's favour or high-end feasts could stop him from speaking the truth. He had also given a man refuge from the heir to the throne. This independent tendency continuously worried the Sultan.

Over in Iran, the Shah was assassinated by a follower of Jamaluddin in the same shrine from which he had banished him. The Sultan, who happened to be a rather superstitious man, considered this a bad omen. He realised that Jamaluddin's speech and writings have a way of inspiring a passion that can lead to the overthrowing of kings. The Sultan therefore escalated the monitoring of Jamaluddin through his spies. All favours and concessions were withdrawn, and even visitors were restricted. When Jamaluddin decided to leave the empire to go to London, he was not permitted to do so. Instead, he received a message saying that it would be humiliating for Islam if Jamaluddin left the caliph of Muslims in anger to stay with non-Muslims. Jamaluddin himself had been considering this very issue, so he abandoned the idea of London. His friend Blunt writes: "When I went to Constantinople again, I met with him. He told me that he lives here half like a guest and half like a captive. He was still glad that his lips had not been sealed. He

could still speak the truth as was his habit, and this he continued to do."

Restrictions increased even further. Soon, the only visitor Jamaluddin was allowed was his student Burhanuddin. The loneliness affected his health and he became quite ill. A swelling rose on his mouth which soon became cancerous.

Tranquility After a Lifetime of Restlessness

This time was a time of great pain and loneliness for Jamaluddin. There is a memorable picture from this time with Jamaluddin sitting on his bed. He has a book in his lap and rosary beads in his hand. In front of him is an issue of the magazine *The New York Herald*.

Medical treatment was not effective, and Jamaluddin's condition continued to worsen. He was often unconscious for long periods of time. The Sultan appointed Dr. Jamil Pasha as his personal physician. During treatment, six of his teeth were knocked out. Jamaluddin expressed a wish to go to Vienna for treatment, but the Sultan did not permit this either.

In this illness and while practically under house arrest, on the 9th of March 1897 CE, Jamaluddin's soul departed to meet its Creator at last. At the time of death he was only 58 years old. According to some reports, his funeral was a quiet one, while others hold that it was a grand, majestic occasion. He was buried anonymously, however, and his grave was unmarked for a long while, until an American citizen had a headstone constructed for it at personal expense. Almost half a century later, his body was taken from Istanbul and reburied in Kabul, Afghanistan.

It has never been confirmed with certainty if Jamaluddin's death was natural, or if it was the result of a conspiracy. Jamaluddin's closest companions have always believed that the death was not

natural. Sultan Abdul Hamid has been suggested to be the culprit. He was accused of sending Jamaluddin poisoned toothpicks, which caused the tumours in his mouth. Some also argued that the physician who was sent to treat Jamaluddin was instructed to administer an injection which caused Jamaluddin's death.

Whether or not his death was natural, the self-interested dictators and monarchs of the Muslim world must have breathed a sigh of relief at his passing from this world. The general Muslim populace, on the other hand, felt that they had been orphaned. A sincere man who had fought for their rights and never compromised on his principles for political gain had died. History stands witness that the rulers who had treated Jamaluddin particularly harshly did not escape nature's vengeance. Khedive Ismail of Egypt was deposed, Shah Nasiruddin was assassinated and Sultan Abdul Hamid II was dethroned in 1908.

Jamaluddin's Unique Qualities and Attributes

Syed Jamaluddin Afghani possessed broad shoulders, a wheatish complexion and a dignified expression which lent support to his authoritative personality. The mesmerising sparkle in his eyes entranced and fascinated his audience, giving weight to what he was saying. He usually donned Arab garb, though he had begun to wear Turkish robes in the last era of his life. His personality did not allow indolence or inactivity. He spent very little time sleeping, and was of the habit of waking up early in the morning. He did not consume much food; indeed, one meal a day was generally sufficient for him. He did, however, enjoy tea and tobacco very much. He also loved reading. He did not wear spectacles although he had to keep the book near his eyes to read properly. Once he began a task, he would become totally absorbed it in, not resting until the task was finished.

Jamaluddin was an excellent conversationalist. He spoke unhurriedly, and only after understanding the other's point of view. His arguments were so persuasive that most people could not help but be converted to his perspective after speaking with him. He was a solemn, contemplative person, not prone to humour or jokes. He was unfailingly polite to all, young or old. People could listen to him for hours without becoming bored or fatigued. Jamaluddin could speak for hours too. Anyone who met Jamaluddin once would leave with an enchanting impression of sincerity, honour, resolve and courage.

He had a superb memory. Merely flipping through a book was enough for him to memorize the contents. He was completely fluent in Pushto, Arabic and Persian, and had learnt French in three months without a tutor. While in Constantinople, he once disagreed with someone on a topic, and declared that three months later, he would give a lecture on that topic in Turkish. Those around him were incredulous, as he was unfamiliar with Turkish, but three months later, he proved his claim true. He could also communicate in Russian and English.

He was highly courageous. He had no qualms in stating the right thing, no matter the perils and other considerations. He used to say: "It is a result of man's negligence that he begins to think that bravery are courage are equivalent to death. If he considers the situation more carefully, he would realize that most of these dangers are only in his imagination." He himself talked to kings with a boldness they were not used to, and it startled them. Nasiruddin once asked him, "What do you wish for?" Jamaluddin replied, "Only your two ears (i.e. your full attention)."

Sometimes his frankness could lead to harshness. When someone would mention of those who had usurped the rights of the common Muslims, his temper would rise and his words could become biting. He abhorred differences over petty issues.

He had no patience with ignorant people, nor with braggarts. He felt no awe when in the presence of important, rich or influential people because he judged people by their character. He also detested pointless or wasteful discussions. While in Calcutta, he was introduced to a famous poet of the time, Daagh Dehlvi, and told that he was the most influential and talented poet of India at the time. Jamaluddin requested a recital of some of his poetry. When Daagh obliged, Jamaluddin fell silent, looking disappointed and sad. After Daagh had left, people asked the reason for such a reaction. Jamaluddin sighed and read a few verses of poetry which reflected regret and grief. He felt unhappy because at a time of such trials and tribulations for the nation, India's greatest poet was speaking of flowers and meadows, of the meetings and separations of lovers, when he should have been inspiring his nation to nobler goals.

Jamaluddin's propensity of speaking only the truth and nothing but the truth, no matter considerations of tact or politics, was an integral part of his personality. His unparalleled insights and his frank, sincere personality transfixed all those who met him. Even the kings would be impressed by his personality and insist on spending more time with Jamaluddin, bringing him closer to them. Subsequently, when Jamaluddin would try to present the interests of the Ummah instead of letting them peddle their self-interests, these kings would become disgruntled with him. Additionally, many in the kings' courts would become jealous of him due to his closeness with the corridors of power and conspire against him in various ways. Jamaluddin, however, never cared much about him enemies. What did he have to lose, after all? He had no household of his own, nor wealth, nor family (he never married). He spent his whole life in pursuit of his mission, and refused the rewards of kings when offered.

This refusal of wealth allowed Jamaluddin to enjoy the freedom of thought the way he did. He was unwilling to exchange his beliefs and opinions for a few notes and coins. Once Nasiruddin

sent him a gift of a diamond ring and a thousand Toman coins. Jamaluddin returned the gift of money, and gave the diamond ring to Nasiruddin's son. While staying in London, Jamaluddin was faced with severe financial difficulties. One of his sympathisers informed his dear friend Blunt of these difficulties in a letter: "I am writing these lines in secret, so please keep the contents to yourself. Jamaluddin's financial situation is very tight. He has had to leave his residence in London and move to the suburbs. Someone tried to help him but he refused. Now he has to travel in third class on the railway." Further on, he wrote, "Please send some money anonymously. If he finds out, he will be furious."

Jamaluddin's student Muhammad Abduh has written a superb commentary on his teacher's personality. Unfortunately, it is too long to quote here and must be summarised. He writes that Afghani's knowledge and understanding were beyond description. He captured the intricacies of language and the meanings of words in great depths. He could also present his argument in different frames. It was easy for him to suggest solutions to even the most complex and difficult problems with just a little contemplation. Whatever topic came up, he was able to converse on it intelligently, and to reach hidden aspects of the subject. Poetry, arts, conversation and debate – his mind worked in all areas and he awed the East and the West with his intellect.

Further on, he writes that in his opinion, apart from the prophets, if Allah has given someone special intellectual powers, insight and wisdom, it would be Jamaluddin. Such is the bounty of Allah, which He bestows on whom He wills, and Allah is the Lord of the highest bounty. The purity of his heart was the highlight of his character. His capacity for tolerance and forbearance was unparalleled amongst his contemporaries, but when the honour of the Muslim nation was in question, his clemency could turn into righteous anger, and sparks would fly. Thus he displayed both extreme tolerance and extreme wrath.

His generosity was such that he often gave away all that he had at the time. He trusted Allah completely, never letting worry for sustenance or financial conditions overcome him. He was very careful with what had been given into his safekeeping. With those who did not hinder his actions, he was patient and treated them with kindness. If someone treated him harshly or tried to put obstacles in his way, he felt justified in being harsh in return. As his intellect and wisdom grew and developed, his natural abruptness softened and became refined.

He was engaged day and night in trying to protect the interests of all Muslims. Wherever he saw a glimmer of hope, he pursued that possibility to obtain whatever benefits he could. He was often faced with despair, and his hopes often crumbled to dust, but he continued his struggle throughout his life. The ups and downs of life could not affect him for long; he bore them with patience, and kept his eyes on the bigger goal. Despite his amazing intellect and other abilities, he never displayed the slightest arrogance. He took pleasure instead in being related to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), because he felt that personal accomplishments and merits were from Allah alone.

An Astonishing Human; A Praise-worthy Muslim

Jamaluddin Afghani was possessed of extraordinary skills, and spent his life in remarkable circumstances. His presence in the midst of selfish, opportunistic and cowardly Muslim rulers was a blessing for the rest of the Muslim population. Disregarding geographical boundaries, he was as a fire, sparking the flames of revolution wherever he went. The opposition of his enemies and the vengeance of kings could do no harm to his lofty ideals and revolutionary convictions. Iqbal's verse is a fitting description of his personality:

In this world, the people of faith live like the sun

Here they sink, there they arise, there they sink, here they arise!

The world was his oyster. Everywhere he went, he conveyed the message that this universe belongs to Allah, not to kings and emperors. Although he had left his own homeland, he became a leader in multiple foreign nations, no mean feat by any standard. He was exiled from various countries but not before the earth beneath reverberated with slogans of change and revolution. The conditions that Muslims across the world were living in – humiliation, slavery, poverty – had snatched away peace and tranquility from his life. Like mercury, he was restless and agitated, willing to sacrifice any and every thing to be able to pull out the Ummah from the pit of despair and disgrace that it had fallen into.

Leaders everywhere tried to convince Jamaluddin to join them, impressed with his intellectual abilities and his popularity with the general public. If he wanted, he could have been a minister, a diplomat, even a Shaikh-ul-Islam, and enjoyed the wealth, influence and status that accompany such positions. But such worldly gains had never been the prize that Jamaluddin sought. His objective was to turn around the moral, intellectual and political degradation of the Muslims and help them reach the zenith that they had once enjoyed. He was particularly resentful of the negligence and shortcomings of the kings and the scholars, the two key elements of Muslim societies. It was unacceptable to him that Western powers should triumph over Muslims, exploiting their resources and wealth for their own gains and turn Muslims into slaves. This slavery was not just physical or geographical, but also mental, cultural, economic and ideological.

Jamaluddin's wise eyes could see the clutches of colonial web tightening around the Muslim nations in the future, and he agonised over it as Muslims slipped deeper and deeper. He was aware that change could not come from cool emotions, soft speeches and a humble tread. Thus he chose a difficult and dangerous path, and began to hold accountable every section of

Muslim society for its poor performance without holding back. Naturally, no one found it easy to accept, and he was exiled and banished from place after place, his meagre belongings confiscated and his dignity torn. He did not allow the hurt to his reputation to bother him, because he was aware that the path he walked was one that prophets have walked, and prophets have had their dignity impugned while walking the path of the truth far more than any other human. He was familiar with the glad tidings of the Quran, addressed to those who give up everything to fight for what is right: “So their Lord answered them: Never will I allow the work of any of you, male or female, to go to waste. You are similar to one another. So, those who left their homelands, and were expelled from their homes, and were tortured in My way, and fought, and were killed, I shall certainly write off all their wrongdoings, and shall certainly admit them into gardens beneath which rivers flow. This is their reward from Allah, and it is Allah with Whom lies the best of rewards.” (Aal-Imran, 195)

His enemies tried very hard to besmirch his reputation, but all their attempts failed, and Jamaluddin’s popularity with the people continued to rise. Among his admirers is Allama Muhammad Iqbal, poet of the East. Iqbal was a fervent admirer and supporter of Jamaluddin Afghani, and remembers him as the pioneer of the Muslim renaissance movement in modern times. He also calls Jamaluddin the greatest Easterner and Muslim of the time. In Iqbal’s opinion, the best and the most mature thinker and doer of our times was born in Afghanistan, who wrote little but spoke much, and groomed all those who had the honour of his company into miniature Jamaluddins. Iqbal claimed that no one person sparked such fervour into the spirit of Islam in this era as much as Jamaluddin did, and that his soul is still active today in the Islamic world, with the sky as its limit.

Jamaluddin Afghani passed away from this world before Iqbal

stepped foot into the practical world. Thus Iqbal meets with Jamaluddin only in his imagination. In his poem "Javaid Nama", after spending time with Rumi on the moon, he steps onto the planet Mercury, where he hears the Adhan being called. He then witnesses Jamaluddin Afghani conducting a congregational prayer, reciting the Quran so beautifully and heart-rendingly that it is beyond description. After the prayer, Iqbal kisses Jamaluddin's hand, and Jamaluddin asks Iqbal about the condition of the Islamic world. Two thoughtful souls burning for the Muslim Ummah share their pain, and the unity of their goals bridges the gaps of space and time. Now Iqbal asks him about the key to solving the numerous problems facing Muslims today. In response, Jamaluddin instructs him to follow the way of the Prophet (peace be upon him), a personality in which noble humanity and the mission of the caliphate were united and at their peak.

The connection that Iqbal shared with Jamaluddin – spiritual, ideological and emotional – and the harmony he enjoyed with him in thought and in action were demonstrated symbolically in the real world too. In December 1944 CE, 47 years after his death, Jamaluddin's body was taken from his grave in Turkey to be reburied in Afghanistan. On the way, the coffin was brought to Lahore for a day. It was first placed for a little while on the steps of Badshahi Mosque, and was then settled next to the grave of Muhammad Iqbal. Thousands of Muslims watched with teary eyes as two great Muslims lay side by side, and prayed for the forgiveness of two individuals who had lived in different times but their hearts had beat to a single rhythm.

Who knows, perhaps the two souls are united in heaven, where they cry over the dishonour in which Muslims have now remained for centuries, praying to the Almighty for the recovery and blossoming of their people. After all, hope was the doctrine of them both, the belief that spring always comes after fall, no matter the length and the harshness of the fall season.

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About the Author

Naima Sohaib, 40, is the author of *"Islami Tareekh ki Qabil-e-Fakhr Shakhsiat"*, a 480-page book in Urdu about fifteen eminent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author. It is the sequel of her first book *"Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shakhsiat"* which discusses twenty prominent Muslim personalities and has seen its fourth edition.

Naima has a Masters in Islamic Studies from University of Karachi and did her B.Sc. in Mathematics from Lahore College for Women. She has also authored several storybooks for children. She lives in Bahrain with her husband and four daughters.

About the Translator

Rida Sohaib, 18, is the English translator of the original Urdu work. An avid reader, she finds particular inspiration in reflecting upon the lives of Muslims born in difficult times who are forced to rise up to the challenge of leadership and find that they bear the mantle well. Her reverence for such heroes is what inspires her to take up the task of translation in the hopes that others will find their stories as rewarding and motivational as she does.

Rida is currently pursuing her Bachelors in Psychology from University College London, UK. She resides in London and shuttles between London and Bahrain.

KHADIJA (RA)

Naima Sohaib

Muslim Heroes series No. 14

Translated by Farhat Malik

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Foreword

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

There may be innumerable books that shed light on the life of Khadija (RA); however, her 'larger than life' personality necessitates that we keep dwelling deeper into her individuality. Whether it be her devotion as a believer, her loyalty as a wife, her success as a business woman or her meritorious skills as a mother, Khadija (RA) proves to be an amazingly inspirational woman in every phase and domain of life.

It was heartfelt admiration for Khadija (RA) that provided me with the impetus to work on this particular translation. I hope and pray that Allah (SWT) grants us the ability to extract, learn and treasure precious lessons from the life of someone so worthy of emulation.

I would like to thank Mr. Sohaib Umar for his help with the formatting and editing of this booklet. Lastly, special thanks to my husband Tariq Raza for his care and support.

Farhat Malik

Khadija (RA)

A Role Model for Muslim Women

Who was Khadija (RA)

Her name was Khadija (RA). She was honoured with the title of Tahira, meaning “pure”. Her family name was Umm-e-Hind. Her genealogical chain is: Khadija bint Khwaylid bin Asad bin Abdul Uzza bin Qussay. It is at Qussay that her genealogical chain meets that of the Holy Prophet (SAW).

Birth

Khadija (RA) was born in Makkah in 556 A.D., about 15 years before the year of the elephant (Aam ul Feel).

Early Life

Although chronological records do not provide us with much detail regarding her childhood years, it is historically proven that her mother was Fatima bint Zayeda, while her father, a prominent member of the Quraish tribe, was Khwaylid bin Asad.

Banu Asad, the tribe to which Khadija (RA) belonged, had been entrusted with the administration of Darun Nadwa. During those times Darun Nadwa performed the role of a modern day parliament house, functioning as a platform for consultation and decision making where an exchange of ideas regarding crucial matters would take place. In addition to managing the affairs of Darun Nadwa, the tribe of Banu Asad was also actively involved in providing care and aid for the poor and the underprivileged.

Khadija's father, Khwaylid, was a man of sound character. His polished personality and empathetic disposition entitled him to praiseworthy recognition. He had allocated an area near his house in order to exclusively cater to the needs of the travelers and the needy. It can be said that Khwaylid was in a league of his own. Unlike many of his contemporaries he was uninterested in and even frustrated with the popular and celebrated pastimes of that age, which revolved around gambling, drinking and womanizing.

It was when Khwaylid settled in Makkah that he married Fatima bint Zayeda. Although they had five children together, it is exclusively due to the high position and status awarded to their daughter Khadija (RA) in history that immortalized their names for centuries to come.

During the age of ignorance (Jahiliyya), Khwaylid was among the top military commanders of the Arabs. According to some sources he passed away before the battle of Fujjar, whereas other sources suggest that he took part in the battle of Fujjar and died during it.

Khadija's childhood was spent in comfort and opulence. Her father was a trader by profession and money was not an issue in the household. Contrary to the norms of that time there was no unfair treatment with the female children of the house, which was the result of noble values of the family. Both Khadija (RA) and her sister Hala (RA) possessed great morals and virtues. Khadija's civilized mannerism, intellect, wisdom, morality and self-respecting attitude were a clear reflection of her upbringing and the atmosphere at her house. It is also worth noting that idol worship was not popular at home. In fact, it is said that Khadija's paternal uncle Nawfal bin Asad was amongst the strong opponents of idol worship. His son Warqa bin Nawfal had taken a step further by denouncing polytheism and accepting Christianity. Though Khwaylid had not openly

renounced the idolatry practices of that time, being closely around his brother's family ensured that he bore no inclination towards Pantheism.

When Khadija (RA) came of age, she was married off to Abu Hala bin Zararah Al Tamimi. They had a son together whom they named Hind (he was brought up by the Prophet (SAW) and grew up to embrace Islam; he was martyred during the war of Jamal in 32 Hijri). After a few years of their marriage Abu Hala passed away. Khadija's parents got her married again to a young Quraishi Ateeq bin Abid bin Abdullah Makhzoomi. They had a daughter who was also named Hind (her son Muhammad later acquired eminence as a renowned narrator of Ahadith; people would call her Umm-e-Muhammad or the mother of Muhammad). It so happened that Khadija's second husband also passed away soon after marriage.

Khadija who was now a widower at the age of 30, was left with the grave responsibility of raising her children and managing her husband's business, all on her own. During the next ten years Khadija (RA) dedicatedly performed the roles of a mother and sole financial provider for her family. Although marriage proposals continued from well-known Quraishi families, she consistently refused them.

Meanwhile, with the passage of time, Khadija (RA) got used to the highs and lows of trade and enterprise. In any case she was not a novice in her profession since both her father and husband had been in the trading business. Though she wouldn't accompany the caravans herself, she entrusted her merchandise with responsible, noble and trustworthy people of the Quraish who would sell in various markets on her behalf and share the profits with her. With Allah's blessing her business prospered by leaps and bounds, so much so that her merchandise alone was said to be equal to the trade goods of all the trading caravans of the tribe put together.

Start of the Relationship between Muhammad (SAW) and Khadija (RA)

During the age of Jahiliyya there was no centrally established authority governing the Arabs. This was why different tribes had established monopoly in different regions. The Arabs were a quarrelsome nation, and the ongoing skirmishes and frays between their tribes rendered travel routes unsafe. Moreover, there was always a threat of attack from caravan looters and burglars. However, it is interesting to note that these very routes were used comfortably by the Quraish. The custodianship of the Kaaba had elevated their status among the tribes. So esteemed was their position that no one dared to even think of harming their wealth and lives.

The uncle of our dear Prophet (SAW) Abu Talib was also a trader. In his youth, the Prophet (SAW) accompanied him during trade journeys to Syria and Yemen. This provided him with valuable business experience and knowledge of other countries. Even in his prime Muhammad (SAW) was known for his serious and mature nature, truthfulness, nobility, integrity and honesty. So much so that he was titled “Ameen” (trustworthy) and “Sadiq” (truthful) by all and sundry.

It is interesting to note that even before being bestowed with prophethood, Muhammad (SAW) appears to have no match in terms of his character and morals. He was concerned for the well-being of relatives and strangers alike. In particular, he was eager to help his uncle feed his large family during times of financial difficulty. It so happened that Allah created the circumstances whereby the Prophet (SAW) could support his aged uncle. One day when the Prophet (SAW) went to meet Abu Talib he made a mention of Khadija (RA) and said: “My dear nephew, you know of my difficult circumstances. Why don’t you meet Khadija bint Khwaylid? She sends people with her trade caravans. They trade her goods and keep some of the

profits. Being aware of your trustworthiness, she would definitely give you preference over others."

According to the tradition of Tabqat Ibne Saad, Khadija (RA) was herself in need of someone reliable and hardworking whom she could trust her business affairs with. When she heard of Muhammad (SAW) she herself sent word for him. She offered to give double the profit she gave to others if Muhammad (SAW) accompanied her caravan to Syria and traded goods for her.

When the Prophet (SAW) gave this news to his uncle he expressed his happiness and said: "This is provision sent your way by Allah the Almighty."

Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) Trade Journey to Syria

Khadija (RA) sent her slave Maysra to accompany Muhammad (SAW) so as to help him during the journey. Not only was Maysra impressed by the good morals and polished character of the Prophet (SAW), he also witnessed some unusually intriguing events during the course of the journey. When they reached Busra the Prophet (SAW) rested himself under the shade of a tree. This tree was located near a huge chapel which itself stood on elevated ground. The priest of this chapel, a hermit by the name Nastura, was well versed with the teachings of the Torah and the Bible. As he came out and glanced down at the caravan, his eyes fell on Muhammad (SAW). The sight of him lying under the tree left him bewildered as according to his knowledge, only a prophet would take shade under that tree.

Highly intrigued by what he saw, Nastura rushed down inquiring about Muhammad (SAW) on his way. When he reached Maysra, he was informed that Muhammad (SAW) was one of the Quraishites from the Haram. He then met with Muhammad (SAW) and initiated a conversation. Nastura would ask the Prophet (SAW) to swear by Laat and Uzza (popular

idols) but he would consistently refrain from doing so. Moreover, Nastura would open his book and repeatedly fix his gaze on the Prophet's face while going over the scripture. It did not take long before the priest's suspicions were confirmed and he started shouting out: "This is the vey person whom Jesus had given tidings of!"

Witnessing the erratic state of the priest, the Quraish feared that Muhammad (SAW) could be harmed. The sense of this threat led them to draw out their swords. Seeing this, Nastura decided to run away. While hastily retreating he shouted out: "O people of the caravan, you feared me while I bore nothing but respect for you. According to our scriptures, this man of yours will be a prophet of God. Whosoever follows him will succeed, while those who don't will perish!"

After this noteworthy occurrence, Maysra developed an even greater level of interest in the personality of Muhammad (SAW). He observed that when the merchandise laden camels would slow down out of exhaustion, one hand stroke by the Prophet (SAW) would reenergize them almost instantly. Maysra also noted how a cloud would be above the Prophet (SAW), providing him shade during times of soaring desert temperatures. Besides these instances what really won Maysra over and convinced him of the extraordinary personality of Muhammad (SAW) was his formidable integrity and honest disposition. To top it all off Allah blessed the caravan with a huge profit, such that had never been made before.

Upon his return to Makkah the Prophet (SAW) gave Khadija (RA) a thorough report regarding the expedition. He handed over all the profit with utmost honesty. When Maysra gave Khadija (RA) an account of the Prophet's laudable qualities and extraordinary events that had taken place, she was profoundly impressed. Muhammad's (SAW) captivating personality won her heart. Until now, Khadija (RA) had turned down marriage

proposals from various wealthy and cultured families. It appears as though she had decided not to marry again but she was so touched by the Prophet's mannerisms that she now wished to send him a marriage proposal herself.

During those times, widowed women had complete authority to independently deal with matters regarding their marriage. Khadija (RA) confided in her friend Nafisa and gave her the task of getting in touch with Muhammad (SAW) to know his opinion regarding the matter. As planned, Nafisa approached the Prophet (SAW) and inquired as to why he had not married as yet (he was in his mid-twenties). He responded that lack of wealth had prevented him from doing so. Nafisa asked him if he would accept a marriage request from a wealthy woman. The Prophet (SAW) inquired as to who she was, and was told that she was none other than Khadija.

What followed was a consultation between the Prophet (SAW) and his paternal uncles. Khadija's family was no stranger in the Prophet's household. In fact, the Prophet's paternal aunt Safiya had been married to Khadija's brother Awam bin Khwaylid. Khadija (RA) herself was a known personality among the Quraish owing to her high financial status and honourable position in the society. Therefore, everyone expressed their consent for this proposal. According to the narration of Tabqat Ibne Saad the acceptance was sent to Khadija's uncle Amr bin Asad who had taken the guardianship of Khadija (RA) after her father's demise.

The Marriage with Muhammad (SAW) – True Appreciation of Human Qualities

On the day of their marriage, the Prophet's uncle Abu Talib along with his brothers and other close relatives arrived at Amr bin Asad's residence. Abu Talib delivered the marriage sermon in which he especially mentioned some exceptional qualities of

Muhammad (SAW). An excerpt from Tareekh-e-Yaqubi provides us with some details: “After praising Allah (SWT) I want to point out that Muhammad bin Abdullah is my nephew in blood. He possesses some laudable attributes. So much so that not one man from the Quraish can match him. It is true that he lacks wealth, but wealth is not comparable with soundness of character and other human qualities.”

After this, he spoke about the bond that was to be formed between the two families. In response, Khadija’s cousin Warqa bin Nawfal gave a sermon. Amr bin Asad then endorsed the Nikah and formally announced the completion of the ceremony. According to the narration of Seerah Ibne Hisham, the “Mehr” (bridal gift) of five hundred dirhams was agreed upon. According to another tradition a bridal gift of twenty camels was finalized, and the Prophet’s uncle took the responsibility for it. At the time of marriage Muhammad (SAW) was twenty five years old while Khadija (RA) was forty.

The important thing about this marriage is the fact that the Prophet (SAW) did not think much of Khadija’s age and her status as a widow whilst considering the proposal. On the other hand, Khadija (RA) also did not bring the Prophet’s relatively poor financial standing into consideration. Both had a higher and deeper purpose in mind, resulting in a marriage that would become an example for generations to come.

While the Prophet’s nature and disposition were of the highest standard, Khadija’s appreciation of these qualities was truly commendable. She was herself blessed with innumerable praiseworthy traits, and that’s why she was known by the title “Tahira” (meaning pure). Now that she was married to the best of men Muhammad (SAW), her status was elevated to such high levels that no other woman in human history can claim to match it. While it is perhaps a matter of divine choice, it is equally important to realize that Khadija’s character, her

honesty and value for righteousness made her markedly deserving of this honorable position.

A Blessed Marital Life – the Union of Holy Souls

Through many biographical sources we find that despite having differences in age and wealth, the Prophet (SAW) and his wife Khadija (RA) led a really happy and contented marital life. Amazingly, the two found no difficulties or constraints in adjusting together. On the one hand, there was the Prophet's extraordinary character which was enough to leave a life-long impression on anyone who met him even once. On the other hand, there was immense love, respect and obedience that Khadija (RA) had for the Prophet (SAW). This guaranteed a happy and peaceful married life.

Khadija (RA) had already been blessed with honour, wealth and children, but the Prophet's company proved to be an unmatched treasure that gave a completely new meaning and vision to her life. After marriage, the Prophet (SAW) shifted to Khadija's home. It was here that her children from previous marriages – Hind bint Ateeq and Hind bin Abi Hala – also resided. Soon Allah (SWT) blessed the Prophet (SAW) and Khadija (RA) with a son whom they named Qasim. Sadly, Qasim passed way in his infancy. Afterwards, the births of their daughters Zainab, Ruqayyah, Umme Kulsoom and Fatima followed. They also had another son Abdullah whose title was "Tahir". He too passed away at a very early age. Not only did Khadija (RA) patiently endure the death of her sons but also persevered in her daughters' upbringing.

The household of Muhammad (SAW) and Khadija (RA) now consisted of their four daughters, Khadija's two children from her former marriages and two boys – Ali Ibne Abi Talib and Zaid bin Harisa. Seeing the difficult financial situation of his uncle Abu Talib, the Prophet (SAW) had taken up the responsibility of his cousin Ali (RA). Zaid bin Harisa (RA), on

the other hand, was a slave boy who had been presented to Khadija (RA) by her nephew Hakim bin Hazam. Zaid bin Harisa belonged to a family of noble status and sound background, which is why his mannerisms and habits reflected polished breeding. Owing to some unfortunate incident, he was taken as a slave, which was common in those times. The Prophet (SAW) was particularly fond of him. Seeing this, Khadija (RA) had presented Zaid (RA) to her husband. Interestingly, the behavior and attitude of everyone in the household towards Zaid (RA) was so kind and loving that he refused to go back to his family when they came to take him.

After her marriage, Khadija (RA) proffered all her wealth to the Prophet (SAW), to be utilized by him in any way he considered appropriate. The Prophet's gentle disposition and kind heart was not only meant for his own family but extended to everyone he knew. He would support the destitute, the poor and the grief stricken. He would take care of the needs of widows, orphans and the marginalized groups of the society. In all these matters Khadija (RA) whole heartedly backed and supported the Prophet (SAW). Her wealth was now his. In fact, her encouraging attitude and cooperative demeanor only fomented the Prophet (SAW) to take his philanthropic work even further.

The Time before Prophethood and the Role of Khadija (RA)

Three major areas of the Prophet's life were prominent after his marriage and before the advent of prophethood. He was an exemplary head of the family and an active patron of the weak and the poor. The third aspect of his personality that we note is the inner struggle he was going through against the idol practices of his time and the silent search for the truth. As mentioned earlier, from a tender age the Prophet (SAW) felt displeased and weary of idol worshipping. When he would take the sheep out to graze in the vast open desert, he would ponder

over what is the truth if idol worshipping is wrong.

The Prophet's thirst for the truth only increased with time. This profound fixation pertaining to life's real purpose and the yearning regarding the reality of the universe led him to prefer solitude and meditation. He would go out of the city towards the nearby mountains where he would spend solitary hours immersed in deep thought. Khadija (RA) would ensure to pack enough food and drink for the Prophet (SAW) to last while he was away from home.

This continued for almost three years. These lengthy odysseys were only possible because Khadija (RA) was taking complete care of household matters. The Prophet (SAW) was at peace inside his home. At that time their eldest daughter Zainab (RA) had been married to Khadija's nephew Abul Aas and she was happy in her marital life. Abu Lahab, the Prophet's uncle, had asked for Ruqayya (RA) and Umme Kulsoom (RA) to marry them with his sons Utba and Utayba. Their Nikah had been performed while the consummation was yet to take place. The fourth daughter Fatima (RA) was very young at this time.

The advent of prophethood was not an instantaneous event. In fact, there were many preceding occurrences that would gradually lead up to the first revelation. When the Prophet (SAW) was about to turn forty, he started having dreams in regular succession which would become reality in everyday life. We also find from historical sources that he would hear surreal voices and sounds during that time. When he would mention about these peculiar supernatural occurrences to Khadija (RA), she would comfort him and offer moral support. She would calm him by saying, "Do not worry; Allah (SWT) will protect you from every harm."

It can be inferred that after closely examining the Prophet's exemplary character Khadija (RA) was convinced that her husband was someone special who had been chosen to travail in

fulfilling some special purpose by the Almighty. She seemed to have a firm belief that divine help will be with her husband at every step of the way. If this were not so, she would have discouraged the Prophet (SAW) from going into solitude and would term the surreal voices and dreams as the handiwork of the Jinns, a logical explanation as per the common beliefs of the time. To the contrary, we find that she did not stop the Prophet (SAW) from pursuing his interests; rather, she encouraged him to continue spending time in thoughtful retreat and meditation.

The Advent of Prophethood and Khadija's Moral Support

At last the time arrived when the mighty word of Allah was to be revealed and the Prophet's divine mission was to commence. This also meant that the tremendous burden of guiding the entire human race was to fall on the Prophet's shoulders. According to the tradition in Sahih Bukhari, it was the month of Ramadan and as usual, Muhammad (SAW) was meditating in the cave of Hira. Suddenly, the angel Jibrael appeared and said: "O Muhammad, read!" To this the Prophet (SAW) replied, "I cannot read". Jibrael embraced the Prophet (SAW) tightly by his chest and commanded him yet again to read. This happened thrice after which the Prophet finally repeated the first five verses of Surah Al Alaq after the angel. Jibrael then disappeared leaving the Prophet (SAW) in fear and confusion about what to make out of this highly unusual incident.

The Prophet (SAW) set out for home while his whole body was shaking with fear and he felt feverish. Upon reaching home he immediately called Khadija (RA) and asked to cover him up. The Prophet (SAW) narrated the entire event to Khadija (RA) and said that he feared for his life. She listened to him patiently and then stated with utmost confidence and conviction: "This cannot be. I swear, Allah will never let you down. You are compassionate and helpful towards all. You give charity to the

poor, you honour the guest and support people in times of need."

These words from his wife consoled the Prophet (SAW). It is important to note that Khadija (RA) had not only believed her husband about the extraordinary incident but had also shown complete faith regarding his personality and character. In addition to this, she had expressed her conviction and trust in the Almighty that He appreciates and values good deeds. The Prophet (SAW) needed this conviction as this was the time when he was himself uncertain about what was happening to him. Khadija's reassurances brought back his confidence upon himself and the shakiness gave way to peace and tranquility.

Khadija (RA) and the Testimony of Prophethood

After the incident of the first revelation, Khadija (RA) thought of visiting her cousin Warqa bin Nawfal. He had converted to Christianity and was writing the Bible in Hebrew at that time. Both Muhammad (SAW) and Khadija (RA) visited Warqa and narrated the incident to him. According to the tradition of Bukhari, Warqa was quick to exclaim that the angel described was the same angel who had previously visited Moses (AS). He said: "Remember! You will be denied and persecuted. I wish that I were young and that I should be present at the time when your people will drive you out." The Prophet (SAW) astonishingly asked: "Will these people drive me out?" Warqa replied: "Yes. Whoever brought a message like yours had to face opposition and undergo great hardship. If I live to see that day, I will certainly stand by your side and support you in every way." Not much time had passed after this conversation that Warqa bin Nawfal passed away.

The Prophet (SAW) and Khadija (RA) had now realized the burden of this divine responsibility. Although Khadija (RA) was happy, it was deep concern for her husband that now occupied her mind. According to a tradition, after the

experience of the first revelation the Prophet (SAW) faced Jibrael (AS) yet again. When he was coming out of the cave of Hira he suddenly heard a voice calling out from above: “O Muhammad! You are the messenger of Allah and I am Jibrael.” As the Prophet (SAW) lifted his head he saw the angel Jibrael in his original majestic form dominating the horizon with 600 wings. Awed by this glorious sight, the Prophet (SAW) immediately set out towards his home.

It so happened that Khadija (RA) had already sent someone out to deliver food to the Prophet (SAW). When the cave was found vacant, she sent some more people out in search of him. They too came back unsuccessful. Upon seeing the Prophet (SAW) finally reach home in this worrisome state, Khadija (RA) inquired: “Abul Qasim, where were you? I sent out people in your search but you were nowhere to be found.” The Prophet (SAW) then related the entire incident. When he quoted Jibrael as saying: “O Muhammad! You are the messenger of Allah” Khadija (RA) responded: “Congratulations to you. Believe me, by the One in whose hand my life is, I always hoped that you would be the messenger for this nation.”

Khadija (RA) had several reasons for her conviction that her husband had in fact been chosen by the Almighty for a grand cause. In addition to Maysra’s testimony, it was the exemplary character of the Prophet (SAW) that she experienced herself as a wife which strengthened her belief in him. A rather intriguing event narrated by Ibne Ishaq helps to shed more light on the matter. Many years before Khadija’s marriage to the Prophet (SAW) it so happened that a group of Quraishi women gathered around the idol of “Habl” on a festive occasion. Many small idols were also placed around the big idol. Among the Quraishi women was Khadija (RA). While the festivity was going on, a Jewish man crossed their path and looked intently at the women folk. He then said: “Soon a prophet will emerge from your people. So whoever amongst you gets a chance to be his wife,

do so."

At first, the women stared back at him in bewilderment. However, the stares soon changed into a shower of stones as they realized that the man was a Jew and bore no special reverence for their idols. Khadija (RA) was the only one who neither cursed nor physically retaliated in defense of the idols. If this narration is true, the statement of the Jewish man may have left an imprint on Khadija's mind, mentally preparing her for some supernatural occurrence. This explains why Khadija (RA) expressed no shock or doubt upon hearing about the divine revelation. It is important to understand, however, that her conviction was not merely based on some supernatural occurrence. Rather, it was the commendable and meritorious character of her husband with whom she had spent fifteen years of marriage that had affirmed her faith in him as a prophet of Allah.

Khadija (RA) accepted Islam and started adopting its ways in her daily life. The way of performing the daily prayers (Salah) and doing ablution (Wudhu) were taught by Jibrael to the Prophet (SAW), who then educated Khadija (RA) regarding the matter. When the Prophet (SAW) would pray, Khadija (RA) would diligently follow. At a time when the whole world was immersed in heedlessness and deceitful pleasures, this blessed couple would spend their nights in devout prostration before their Lord. Ali (RA) noticed the recent changes in the household practices and inquired the Prophet (SAW) about them. The Prophet (SAW) informed him about his prophethood and invited him to Islam. Ali (RA), who was still a young boy, responded that it was something he had never heard before and he wanted to consult his father before making a decision. Soon, though, Allah opened up his chest for Islam and he embraced the religion. In this way, Allah (SWT) made the household conditions appeasing and comfortable for the Prophet (SAW). What would have been more uplifting for him than to see his

wife and children readily accepting and following the way of Allah? In addition, the other two members of the house, i.e. Ali (RA) and Zaid bin Harisa (RA) also accepted Islam from the beginning.

In its early days the practices and teachings of this newly blossoming faith were propagated in a rather discreet manner. A few close companions of the Prophet (SAW) accepted Islam but it could not remain a secret for long. Soon the Quraish came to know about it. An interesting description of Islam's early days is given in the words of Afif Kindi: "I once arrived in Makkah for Hajj. Since I was also a trader I went to Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib in order to purchase some merchandise. He was a friend of mine. Usually he would purchase perfume from Yemen and then sell it in Makkah. While I was seated by my friend, a young man came and looked observantly at the sun. When the sun set a little towards the west, the man scrupulously performed ablution and then stood up for prayer. A little while later an adolescent boy came, performed ablution and started praying beside the man. In the same manner, a woman also arrived, performed ablution and stood praying behind the man. I said to Abbas: "Woe to you, O Abbas! What practice is this?" Abbas (RA) replied: "This is the religion of my nephew, Muhammad bin Abdullah. The young man Ali (RA) is also a nephew of mine. The woman you see is Khadija (RA), the wife of Muhammad (SAW). They both have accepted and adopted his religion." In another narration the wordings are "none except these two have accepted his prophethood". Later on, we find that Afif Kindi also embraced Islam. While reflecting back on the incident described above, he would often express his regret on not being the fourth Muslim among the people praying behind the Prophet (SAW).

The episode portrayed above is of a time when Islam was in its fairly initial stages. Only the members of the Prophet's household had embraced Islam during that period.

Khadija's Courage and Support during the Reign of Persecution

The prediction by the farsighted Warqa Bin Nawfal proved to be true. As soon as the news of this new religion reached the ears of the Quraish, they started pursuing the Prophet (SAW) regarding his mission. The same Quraish who until now would hold Muhammad (SAW) in high regard started to cast a doubtful eye on him. The most worrying aspect for them was the fact that not only was the Prophet (SAW) practicing this new religion himself but also inviting others towards it. This invitation was accepted by a few, and these were no ordinary people. Some of the most esteemed and well to do people were among the converts (e.g. Abu Bakr). Since the leaders of the Quraish could not openly derange the wealthy and the powerful, they decided to take their abomination out on the weak and destitute believers. Despite all the trials and tribulations that the believers were being put through, the religion of Islam continued to spread and grow among the Makkans. It was obvious that circumstances had become stringent for the Prophet (SAW), while Khadija (RA) stood by him every step of the way.

The Quraish now started showering the Prophet (SAW) with taunts and insolent remarks. It was habitual for them to call Muhammad (SAW) a mad man, a sorcerer and a poet. Some would even go as far to say that the word of Allah (SWT) had been fabricated by the Prophet himself. It is important to understand that Khadija (RA) was the daughter of a highly regarded man from the tribe of Quraish. At the same time, she had wed the man renowned for his dignity and trustworthiness. All her life, she was viewed as someone highly deserving of respect. Now in her old age she was having to witness insulting remarks being passed on her husband openly in the marketplace. Surely it would have been a painful experience to endure but she persisted in believing what she thought was true

and kept up the much needed support and loyalty for her husband.

The Prophet's uncle Abu Lahab and his wife Umme Jamil had their residence in the Prophet's neighborhood. The two started directing physical abuse in addition to verbal torments towards the Prophet (SAW) and his family. Litter and trash were thrown into the Prophet's home, while at other times thorny stems and bushes were laid out in the Prophet's path. Umme Jamil was known for her sharp tongue and would often foul mouth the Prophet and his family. One can imagine the patience Khadija (RA) would have shown during these trying times, keeping in mind that she was in no way inferior to these people. The Prophet (SAW) had standing instructions to all Muslims not to indulge in unnecessary arguments with the non-believers and continue with their efforts.

Safi ur Rahman Mubarakpuri writes in his book *"Ar Raheeq ul Makhtoom"*: "The group of people involved in troubling the Prophet (SAW) within his home includes Abu Lahab, Hakam bin Abi al Aas, Uqba bin Abi Mueet, Adi bin Hamrai, Ibn ul Asad Hazli. All these people were the Prophet's neighbours, and none embraced Islam except Hakam bin Abi al Aas. They would bedevil and pester the Prophet (SAW) by throwing a goat's uterus upon him while he prayed, such that it would fall right on him. Sometimes they would target the cooking vessels containing food for the day. Tired of these acts and in order to be able to pray in peace, the Prophet (SAW) built a small shack for himself."

This was the situation inside the household of the Prophet (SAW) which was shared by all the members of the family. The afflictions that awaited the Prophet outside his house were the ones that he had to endure all on his own. One can only try to imagine what his children and beloved wife would have felt upon seeing the Prophet (SAW) return home in a painful, grief

stricken state. After all, stones were pelted at him, trash and decaying bones were flung, and some would spit on him as they crossed his path. In fact, the animosity he had to deal with was so intense that his own uncle Abu Lahab is said to have rushed out in excitement upon the death of the Prophet's son Abdullah, claiming that Muhammad (SAW) had finally been broken off the root, with no son to carry his name forward. When the Prophet (SAW) would return home after these heart wrenching incidents, Khadija (RA) would try her utmost to soothe him and lift his morale.

It has often been seen that even good people are pushed to compromise their values and principles when the happiness of their children is at stake. However, in the case of Khadija (RA) nothing could cause her to waiver from the path of Allah. Before the advent of prophethood, Ruqayya and Umme Kulsoom had been engaged to the sons of Abu Lahab – Utba and Utayba. The Nikah had also been done but the consummation was yet to be carried out. Now that the Prophet (SAW) was inviting people to Islam and away from idol worship, Abu Lahab decided to get back at his nephew by ordering his sons to divorce both Ruqayya and Umme Kulsoom. The sons obeyed their father and divorced the Prophet's daughters. It was evident that trials and difficulties were on the rise for Khadija (RA). In addition to all the other hardships, the fate of her daughters was now in question. Who would take their hands in marriage when their own uncle had refused to accept them? However, it appears that her trust in Allah was supreme that He will not leave His faithful slaves alone. And indeed her conviction was proven right. Ruqayya (RA) got married to Usman (RA) who was well known among the Quraish for his altruistic disposition, nobility, wealth and admirable character. Most importantly, he was amongst the few who had accepted Islam during its initial days. Both Ruqayya and Usman were part of the group of believers that migrated to Abyssinia (present-day Eritrea and the northern half of

Ethiopia) in order to flee the persecution.

As the numerical strength of the Muslims rose, so did the ruthless afflictions of the Quraish. They had realized that despite all their efforts the matter was getting out of hands for them. Unless a decisive step was taken, it would become impossible to curb the growth of the new religion. The one thing that stood as a barrier for the Quraish was the presence of Abu Talib. While he hadn't accepted Islam himself, he had pledged complete support and protection for his nephew. Since Abu Talib was the head of the Banu Hashim tribe, no one could dare to lay hands on the Prophet (SAW). And if someone did, it would most definitely lead to widespread killing and bloodshed in Makkah because Banu Hashim would take revenge as per the practice of the tribal society there. Since physically eliminating the Prophet (SAW) was not possible politically, the leaders of the Quraish decided to opt for the second best alternative, that is, a social and economic boycott. They agreed among themselves that the tribes of Banu Hashim and Banu Muttalib would be completely boycotted by the whole of Makkah. No one would be permitted to marry, trade goods or even socialize with them. This would be the stance of the Quraish unless the people of these tribes denounced Muhammad (SAW) and gave away the Prophet to them. This decision was officially written and hung on the door of the Kaaba.

This ostracism was extremely daunting for Abu Talib and his people. In these miserable circumstances he had no choice but to bring the tribe of Banu Hashim towards a valley near the cave of Hira, where they would settle temporarily. This valley later came to be known as *Shaib Abi Talib*. It was in this valley that Khadija (RA) too remained confined with her daughters during the period of the boycott. According to a narration in Zaad Al Maad Muslims faced utmost misery during this period. The boycott resulted in starvation, whereby people went on days without food. Khadija (RA) had to endure this hardship at

the feeble age of over sixty years. She spent all her remaining wealth for the people of the tribe, providing food and necessities while she could. When all was spent Khadija (RA), who was brought up in the most affluent of households, was forced to live on boiled leaves for survival, together with the other Muslims. At times when even leaves wouldn't be available, the wailing of the hunger stricken children would resonate from the valley. The youngest daughter of the Prophet (SAW) was amongst these children and was left pale with weakness as a result of extreme and frequent starvation.

The test that the Almighty had put the Muslims in was formidable, but their faith was also unwavering. On the other hand, the Quraish had crossed all limits of inhumanity in their hatred towards Muslims. At times, Khadija's relatives would secretly send food for those besieged in the valley. During one such occasion, Khadija's nephew Hakim bin Hazam sent his slave with some wheat grains for the Muslims. On his way towards the valley he was caught by Abu Jehl, who tried to snatch the eatables away. In the midst of all this Abul Bakhtari crossed their path. Though he was not a Muslim, he was kind at heart. Displeased with Abu Jehl's attitude he asked him, "If a person wants to send some food for his aunt, what makes you stop him?" The conversation soon hurled up into a huge argument and other people also joined in. Serious questions were raised regarding the nature of the boycott, while some even expressed concern and regret pertaining to the harshness with which it was imposed. Some even wished to end it altogether. The Prophet (SAW) informed his family and friends of this heartening development. The next day when the matter arose in the conference of the Quraish it was seen that the official document had been eaten up by termites. The only piece of writing that remained on the document was the name of Almighty Allah (SWT). Therefore, the boycott was cancelled and the Muslims were finally liberated from their affliction after three tiresome years.

When Khadija (RA) returned home, her health had deteriorated to a great degree. At an old age she had been displaced from her home and had undergone extreme difficulty and starvation. All her wealth had been spent in the way of Allah (SWT). Despite her age and affluent background, Khadija (RA) bore all the adversity with resilience and without complaint. It seems as though the mission of the Prophet (SAW) had become Khadija's own mission. Now, after having given away everything in the way of Allah, Khadija (RA) was ready to return to her Lord.

Khadija's Death and the Year of Grief

After the boycott had ended the Prophet (SAW) returned to his mission with even more zeal and determination. At home, his wife was his faithful friend while his uncle Abu Talib was an ardent supporter outside. However, the time was now up for both of them. Abu Talib was first to bid farewell to the world, while Khadija (RA) passed away just three days later. It was the tenth year of prophethood. After spending 25 years in the service and companionship of the Prophet (SAW) Khadija (RA) passed away in the month of Ramadan at the age of 65.

Deeply saddened by the demise of his beloved wife, the Prophet (SAW) himself carried out the burial (her grave is still present at a place called Hujun). Having been deprived of Khadija's loving companionship and Abu Talib's mighty support, the Prophet (SAW) found himself in utter sorrow. For him Khadija (RA) was not just an obedient wife, she was also a loyal and self-sacrificing life partner. Not only did she stand by his side and supported him during the roughest and darkest of times, she actively facilitated him in the work of prophethood. To top it all, Khadija (RA) was a woman with extraordinary traits and an amazing character. The way she sacrificed her resources, her time and her own self for the Prophet (SAW) and his mission is an example that will not find many parallels in human history.

The departure of Khadija (RA) had such a profound impact on the Prophet (SAW) that he named the year of her demise "the year of grief".

The entire Muslim Ummah has consensus over the faithfulness, wisdom, generosity and devotion of Khadija (RA). Non-Muslim historians and analysts have also made mention of her commendable traits and have showered their appreciation in most gracious words. Constance Giorgio writes about her in his book: "From the very day on which the Prophet (SAW) informed Khadija (RA) of the beginning of his mission, she decided to expend her wealth and resources in the propagation and expansion of Islam. She dedicatedly continued to do so until her last days. The day she passed away, there was nothing even worth a date seed available at hand. Two exemplary beings have lived amongst the Muslims who disbursed all they had in the way of Islam. They are Khadija (RA) and Abu Bakr (RA). Both were affluent before the advent of Islam and when they died they did not have even a penny left with them."

Khadija's High Stature

It was enough to prove the superior status of Khadija (RA) that she was blessed to be the first wife of the Prophet (SAW) and the very first *Mother of the Believers* (Umm ul Momineen). Besides this, the Prophet (SAW) also expressed his appreciation for her on various occasions as we can read in Hadith and Seerah books. The Prophet (SAW) called Khadija (RA) "the best woman of the Ummah". It is reported by Ali (RA) in Sahih Bukhari that he said: "Maryam bint Imran was the best amongst women (of the Muslim Ummah of her time) while Khadija is of the highest standing amongst the women (of Ummat-e-Muhammad)."

In a tradition of Musnad Ahmed we find that there are four women who are of the highest and most exalted rank in Jannah. These are (1) Asiya, the wife of the Pharoah, (2) Maryam bint

Imran, (3) Khadija bint Khwaylid, and (4) Fatima bint Muhammad.

Moreover, we find that Khadija (RA) had been given the glad tiding of having acquired a place in Jannah during her life. Jibrael (AS) once visited the Prophet (SAW) and said: “O Prophet of Allah, Khadija (RA) is coming towards you with a container of food. Convey her salutation from her Lord and myself. Also give her the news of being granted a palace of pearls in Jannah where there will be no disturbing noise nor any type of discomfort.” This Hadith is mentioned in both Bukhari and Muslim.

Even after the death of his beloved wife the Prophet (SAW) would often make mention of her. Ayesha (RA) is reported to have said that she never felt as envious of any other wife of the Prophet (SAW) as she did of Khadija (RA). This was the case even though Khadija (RA) had passed away before her marriage to the Prophet (SAW). The reason behind this envy was the frequent mention of Khadija (RA) by the Prophet (SAW), and the fact that whenever he would slaughter a goat he would send a portion of the meat to Khadija’s friends. (Bukhari).

In another narration of Bukhari, Ayesha (RA) states that once Khadija’s sister Hala bint Khwaylid came to visit the Prophet (SAW) and called out for permission to enter. Upon hearing her voice the Prophet was taken by surprise and said: “O Allah may it be Hala.” This was because Hala’s voice was very similar to that of her sister’s. Ayesha (RA), who was a witness to this became upset and lamented in these words: “You reminisce over a Quraishi woman who is long dead and Allah has blessed you with a better wife than her.” The Prophet’s expression turned sour; upon seeing his reaction Ayesha (RA) instantly responded: “I swear by Allah Who has sent you with the truth, that I will never again make mention of Khadija (RA) unless it is in her praise.”

We find a similar incident in the tradition of Sahih Muslim, whereby the Prophet (SAW) replied to Ayesha (RA) by saying: "This is because love and adoration for Khadija (RA) has been planted in my heart by Allah (SWT) himself." Musnad Ahmed provides us more details regarding this incident. According to this tradition, Ayesha (RA) said: "O Prophet of Allah, you keep making mention of the old Quraishi lady whose ankles were skinny, whose teeth had fallen out and a long while has passed since her death. And Allah has even granted you a better substitute for her." To this the Prophet (SAW) replied: "There is no comparison for a woman like Khadija. She testified for me (in my prophethood) whilst the whole world denied me. At a time when everyone deprived me, she shared her wealth with me. And Allah bestowed me with children through her and not through any other wife."

Words are not enough to describe the good fortune of Khadija (RA). Allah (SWT) was pleased with her and honoured her with salutations along with the tidings of paradise. The Prophet (SAW) never tired of praising her in the most laudatory of ways. And she was made an ideal example and a role model for billions of Muslim women to follow till the end of the world.

The Holy Prophet (SAW) was truly in love with Khadija (RA). Even after her death, whenever anything was brought before his eyes that reminded him of Khadija, he was deeply moved. For instance, the Prophet's son-in-law Abu Al Aas (who had not yet embraced Islam) was captured in the battle of Badr. His wife, the Prophet's daughter Zainab (RA), sent an expensive necklace as compensation to set him free. This necklace was a gift from Khadija (RA) that she had given to her daughter at the time of marriage. When the Prophet (SAW) saw this necklace he was overwhelmed with emotion. He requested his companions: "If you deem it appropriate, set Zainab's prisoner free and return her ransom payment." The companions of the Prophet agreed to it; Abu Al Aas was released and the necklace was also returned.

(Ibne Saad).

In another instance we find that once a woman with dark complexion visited the Prophet (SAW). The Prophet (SAW) welcomed her with a lot of warmth. After she had left Ayesha (RA) asked the Prophet (SAW) regarding the hospitality shown towards this woman. He told her that the woman would often visit Khadija (RA) during her life. This gives an indication how much the Prophet (SAW) loved Khadija (RA).

Khadija (RA) - an Inspiration and a Role Model for All Women

The Prophet (SAW) declared Khadija (RA) as the best amongst all the women of his Ummah. Her extraordinary character and non-controversial personality has received appreciation and envy from even non-Muslim authors. The author of "*Islamic Marriage Laws"* writes: "The position held by Muhammad's first wife amongst women in Islam is one that can never be acquired by any other woman. This virtuous woman was really smart, intelligent, wise and resourceful. Her intelligence and wisdom brought many a success for Islam and removed obstacles from the path of the messenger of Islam. She was a courageous woman and highly dedicated to her faith, who sacrificed everything in the cause of Islam. It would not be wrong to say that a woman with such loyalty, obedience and self-sacrifice is not likely to ever be born again on the face of this earth."

The Prophet (SAW) was so satisfied with the companionship provided by his wife that he did not marry another woman during the life of Khadija (RA). Reflecting on her qualities, one may come to conclude that perhaps nature had particularly handpicked her for assisting and supporting the mighty work of prophethood. She was a pure soul by nature. Even during the period of ignorance (Jahiliyya) Khadija (RA) had no inclination

towards idol worship. It is recorded in the tradition of Musnad Ahmed that before the advent of prophethood, Muhammad (SAW) once declared that he would never worship Laat and Uzza. Upon hearing this Khadija (RA) not only agreed with him but also suggested that these idols may never even be mentioned again.

This makes us understand why she was ready to believe in the Prophet (SAW) when he presented himself as Allah's messenger. She followed the divine revelation in its letter and spirit as it arrived. Hence the first human being in the world who believed in the Quran and the Prophet (SAW) was this glorious woman who left everyone behind to attain this special status.

Khadija (RA) is the role model for Muslim women not just because she was a sincere and loyal wife and a good mother. Many women exhibit these qualities. She was unique because she had overcome to a great extent the weaknesses and negative traits commonly found amongst women. She was not superstitious, hasty, impatient or prone to hopelessness. She would not use her tongue as a weapon to victimize or blame others. She was a selfless person. Beyond her own self and family, she had a concern for the humanity at large, and therefore fully understood the importance of the Prophet's mission.

Khadija's intellectual capabilities and wisdom outclassed those of the average man. When the angel Jibrael first descended with the word of Allah (SWT) Khadija (RA) did not take her husband to any magician or soothsayer. Instead, she had correctly conceived that the matter was about divine work and hence chose her cousin Warqa Bin Nawfal whose vast knowledge regarding sacred scriptures would offer them guidance.

Her faith and conviction in Allah (SWT) was extraordinary. In

the most trying of circumstances, when ordinary emotional women have to be held and comforted by their husbands, Khadija (RA) kept offering encouragement and consolation to the Prophet (SAW). She reassured him time and again that Allah (SWT) would never let his righteousness and sincerity go in vain. After the declaration of prophethood the situation turned difficult for the Prophet (SAW) and his household. Khadija (RA) suffered from these trials and hardships till the end of her life. The war victories, prosperity and people turning to Islam in droves, she witnessed none of this while she was alive. Still, she remained remarkably positive and hopeful that the truth would at last prevail. Never once did she complain to Allah regarding the delay in the acceptance of her supplications, nor did she show impatience to the Prophet (SAW) through her attitude. She remained steadfast through the demise of her sons, the divorce of her daughters and the scarcity of resources especially towards the later years. Khadija (RA) always prioritized her faith over worldly life. In this matter, no bias came her way unlike Abu Talib who could not disentangle himself from the religion of his forefathers.

In contrast to the wives of Nuh (AS) and Lut (AS), who sided with the misled people of their communities instead of believing the message of Allah (SWT), Khadija (RA) rose above all these pressures and clung to the truth with complete devotion. This determination made her a genuinely upright and focused (Haneef) Muslim. Being focused in the way of the truth is a quality which is very dear to Allah (SWT), one of the reasons why He has also called Prophet Ibrahim (AS) a focused Muslim in the Quran. Khadija (RA), too, was a traveler of this path, and she was ready to sacrifice her status, wealth, children and life during this trying journey.

Another aspect of Khadija's life sets an example for Muslim women – that if their husbands are busy in performing an important task for the Muslim Ummah, or are genuinely

talented and determined to pursue higher objectives, then they should support and assist their husbands instead of coming in their way. In such cases the wives should be willing to sacrifice some of the time and attention they deserve from their husbands for themselves and their children. In addition, they can provide active support to their husbands, as Khadija (RA) did, in order to participate in the good cause. During her marital life, we see that Khadija (RA) got to experience all kinds of circumstances. The Prophet (SAW) would often seek isolation in the cave of Hira for meditation, whilst at other times he would go and preach in the markets of Makkah. After his prophethood he would not get the time to trade and earn. Instead, the savings would all go into helping the poor. All this while, Khadija (RA) never once complained of their financial situation. Neither did she nag her husband regarding the lack of family time, nor worry him regarding the future of their daughters. Instead she was herself at the forefront, encouraging and assisting the Prophet (SAW) every step of the way. The biographers of the Prophet's life have a consensus over the opinion that Khadija (RA) had completely assuaged and satisfied the Prophet (SAW) regarding the household matters so that he could focus all his attention to carrying out the work of Allah.

Another beautiful aspect of Khadija's personality was that along with being a successful business woman she was also an exemplary housewife. Moreover, she was totally obedient to her husband despite being older to him in age and wealthier financially. Instead of taking pride in her intellectual abilities and status amongst the Quraish, her attention always centered on the laudable attributes of the Prophet (SAW). Khadija's personality as a wife comes forth as one who was holistically sacrificing for the sake of her husband. She was always appreciative of her husband's qualities and ready to provide support whenever needed. Khadija (RA) was so well aware of her husband's temperament that we do not find a single incident worthy of consideration pertaining to a fight between them in

their twenty five years of married life. It should be noted that Khadija (RA) bore six children after the age of forty. Having to deal with the tremendous responsibility of raising children alongside the tribulations that prophethood brought with itself, it is normal to expect that one would become irritable in nature. Yet we see that Khadija (RA) was particularly blessed in that she was saved from negative thoughts and attitude.

Some light should also be shed on the maternal aspect of Khadija's life. Along with the six children that she had with Muhammad (SAW), she had two from her previous marriages. She was extremely fortunate that Allah showed all her children the true path. Her youngest daughter Fatima (RA) was named the leader of the women of Jannah by the Prophet (SAW) himself. Undoubtedly, Khadija (RA) gave them an outstanding upbringing. The children from her previous marriages also accepted Islam and their state in Islam was also truly admirable.

We thus find that Khadija's personality is so holistically complete that it offers an amazing example for all Muslim women to come. Her search for worthy qualities when choosing a husband, the righteousness of her character, the courage and steadfastness in faith when faced with hardships, her loyalty as a wife, her exemplary character as a mother – all are commendable traits of her personality. Her intellect, composure, wisdom, sensibility, generosity, kind nature and ability to recognize the shallowness of the seemingly glamorous aspects of life – the list is endless and one cannot decide which aspect is more commendable than the other. Undoubtedly in the life and personality of Khadija (RA) we find a complete and ideal Muslim woman, worthy of emulation. This is the reason why Allah (SWT) sent his blessings upon Khadija (RA) and His beloved servant Muhammad (SAW) valued and loved her with all his heart.

In reality Khadija (RA) has done a magnanimous favour to the

entire Muslim Ummah. Not only did she play a vital role in the work of advancing Islam alongside her husband, she also left an extraordinary example for us through her life. In particular, for Muslim women for all times to come she serves as a light house to guide them in their roles and achieve success in this world and next.

The author of *"A View of Islam"* writes and how correct he is: "Khadija was endowed with such qualities that, leave aside non-Muslims, even Muslims cannot fully appreciate them. This lady possessed a brave heart, had nerves of steel, was high spirited, and had forbearing nature and a staid composure. She played a critical role in the success of the Prophet's mission and advancing the cause of Islam throughout the Arab world. The grand task she carried out was one that would have not been possible even for a man of courage. The feminine world can never again produce such a wise and high caliber woman."

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About the Author

Naima Sohaib, 40, is the author of *"Islami Tareekh ki Qabil-e-Fakhr Shakhsiat"*, a 480-page book in Urdu about fifteen eminent Muslim scholars, reformists, revivalists and caliphs of the last 1400 years, including several from the twentieth century. The book is written in easy language, punctuated occasionally by pertinent and thought-provoking comments by the author. It is the sequel of her first book *"Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shakhsiat"* which discusses twenty prominent Muslim personalities and has seen its fourth edition.

Naima has a Masters in Islamic Studies from University of Karachi and did her B.Sc. in Mathematics from Lahore College for Women. She has also authored several storybooks for children. She lives in Bahrain with her husband and four daughters.

About the Translator

Farhat Malik, 24, is the English translator of the original Urdu work. Her profound reverence for the personality of Khadija (RA) in particular inspired her to take up the task of this translation.

Farhat has recently completed her B.Sc. degree in International Development from the London School of Economics. She currently resides in Lahore, Pakistan with her husband and her feisty fifteen month old baby girl